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**THE INVENTION OF IDENTITIES IN THE ARAB  
MIDDLE EAST:  
A STUDY AND A CRITIQUE OF ANTOUN  
SAADEH'S SYRIAN NATIONALISM**

BY:

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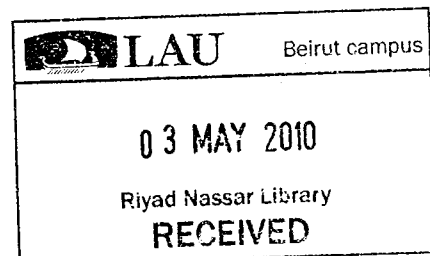
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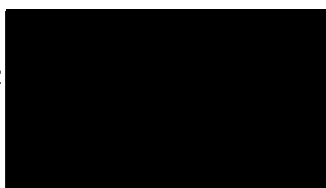
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To my father

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**Abstract:**

This thesis examines Antoun Saadeh's national ideas by using Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined community." It aims at unpacking Saadeh's thoughts by using a new perspective to clarify his vision of what a nation is and the basis on which he had constructed his theory on Syrian nationalism.

The study examines critically Saadeh's concept of nationalism with particular emphasis on the relationship of this concept to both Arabs and Islam. It also traces the origins of Saadeh's thought and the sources from which he derived his national and historical writings to formulate the concept of Syrian nationalism. The current research also provides an epistemological evaluation of Saadeh's ideas via resorting to scholarly studies which reveal some of his historical fallacies. The main contribution of this thesis is meant to expose the way through which Saadeh had formulated the Syrian "imagined community".

The current study unveiled that Saadeh's version of Syrian nationalism was a novel case. It is a form of what Benedict Anderson considered to be an "official nationalism." In this case Saadeh's political party, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, was and remains to be a "state within a state." By implementing Anderson's model, Saadeh's ideology attempts to place the inhabitants of the "fertile crescent" in one "organic body," by providing them, through its propaganda and party discipline, with a new vision on "life, the universe and art." This was conducted through reviving the heritage of the ancient civilizations in the region and avoiding the Arab-Islamic tradition. Such a view overlooks the Arab presence and assumes that it was both trivial and unnecessary within the realm of the Syrian nation. Accordingly, Saadeh vigorously indicated that Syrian nationalism

proved to be a channel through which segments of minority groups within the Arab Middle East were able to illustrate their vision of the past, the present and the future.

Saadeh's nationalist discourse sought to create a unifying identity for the inhabitants of the "Fertile Crescent" region. This was conducted through promoting an anthropological biological interpretation of what nation is, based on the effect of geography and racial fusion on the course of development of the Syrian nation.

The current study also proved that Benedict Anderson's interpretation of the rise of nationalism remains to be viable even in colonial states. Saadeh was one example of the validity of Anderson's historical paradigm. He was indulged in creating a specific "Syrian" nation by attempting to impose his national theory through his party.

"Syrian" nationalism remains to be a source of understanding contemporary Arab intellectuals' mindset. This is evident in the eclectic nature of both Saadeh's social and economic ideas. He is an example of what can be perceived as the "Arab attitude of mind," where western ideologies are fused with traditional ones. The implications of this ideological process are embedded in the formation of hybrid ideology that neither represents the old ideas nor the modern ones. Instead such an outlook creates a distorted form of intellectual consciousness.

Finally, the study proves that Saadeh's ideology and historical perspective regarding the existence of a unique civilization in the Fertile Crescent extending from the ancient past, intersects with several modern Arab historians and writers' studies and research. This clarifies that Saadeh's national ideology is currently active in the Arab Middle East notwithstanding the fact that Saadeh's party is politically weak.



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## **Introduction:**

### **The Arab Middle East and the Question of Identity:**

This study examines Antoun Saadeh's Syrian nationalism. It aims at unpacking his ideas and ideologies from an epistemological perspective. He is still considered to be an ideological magnet in the Arab Middle East, especially that his party, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, is still active in our present times within the region. Hence, the main purpose of this study is to comprehend the manner through which Saadeh "imagined" the Syrian nation, and to find if his nationalistic ideas correlate with Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities."

The issue of nationalism remains in flux in the Arab Middle East, yet, it is considered to be of vital importance since it has its bearing on how the inhabitants of the region view themselves and the "other," namely the West.<sup>1</sup> Saadeh's version of nationalism is one out of several competing identitarian ideologies therein. It is vital to study his ideology since this offers a glance at the manner through which identities are constructed within the region.

Saadeh's Syrian nationalism emerged in the 1930(s) and 1940(s) of the past century. It developed during a time when radical forms of nationalism were in existence, namely Fascism and Nazism in Italy and Germany respectively (Yamak, 1969: 67). Also Arab nationalism was at its zenith during that era.<sup>2</sup> Hence, the issue of identity and the debates regarding it were extremely heated. The Arab nationalists opted for uniting the Arab

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<sup>1</sup> The relationship between the Arab intellectuals and the West is fully discussed in Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798-1939*, 3<sup>rd</sup> reprint, (London: Oxford University Press, 1970).

<sup>2</sup> For details on the development of Arab nationalism in the interwar period, note: C. Earnest Dawn, "The Formation of Pan-Arab Ideology in the Interwar Years," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (Cambridge), no.20, 1988, pp. 67-91.

world in one state, while Saadeh aimed at uniting the “fertile crescent”<sup>3</sup> and rejected Arabism. A third variant of nationalism emerged which advocated the existence of a “Phoenician” Lebanon.<sup>4</sup> Thus, it is evident that Lebanon was witnessing severe competition between these three identitarian ideologies.

Saadeh’s party was one answer to two pending questions which occupied the minds of both the Lebanese and the inhabitants of the Arab Middle East: Who are we? And what is it to be done? This was particularly the case when the observer realizes that the region was under the colonial rule of both France and Great Britain. Thus, Saadeh and his ideology were part of the aforementioned debate and had a significant contribution to this issue. In this study, his input on this subject will be fully discussed in order to realize the manner through which he developed his arguments and their significance.

Saadeh wrote immensely on a great deal of subjects, however, this study will concentrate on providing a thorough understanding of his national ideology. Its main aim is to expose the patterns in Saadeh’s thought. In order to accomplish the aforesaid goal, it is needed to examine Syrian nationalism via a specified framework. In this respect, as mentioned above, Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities” remains to be an indispensable tool for comprehending Saadeh’s ideas. Hence, the current study aims at envisioning if Saadeh and his ideas fit the general course of the development of nationalism, which Anderson brilliantly outlined.

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<sup>3</sup> The “fertile crescent” is a geographic term coined by the American Egyptologist James Henry Breasted. It includes today’s Iraq, Jordan, Israel, the West Bank, Lebanon and Syria.

<sup>4</sup> For further details on the subject, note: Asher Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia: in search of identity in Lebanon*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004).

### **Imagined Communities: Past and Present:**

The concept of “imagined communities” clarifies that nations evolved in a long historical process starting from the 18<sup>th</sup> century until the 20<sup>th</sup>. According to Anderson, the first stage was when the Creoles<sup>5</sup> in the Americas developed a “national consciousness” after the rise of the printed press. This enabled them to feel united in the face of the grievances which they suffered from, as they were treated as second class state functionaries in comparison with their peers in their homeland, namely Spain and England (Anderson, 1999, chapter 6). Also, the rise of print press and vernacular languages provided a vehicle through which Creoles began to infuse a sense of unity among them (Anderson, 1999: chapter 3). The radical manifestation of the aforesaid consciousness took place during the American Revolution against England in 1776, where the Creoles wrote their declaration of independence (Anderson, 1999: p.192).

The second stage was in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century. After the rise of the new “national consciousness,” some leading dynasties were concerned that their existence and their empires will be marginalized. Hence, they began spreading the idea of “formal nationalism.” This included attempts to spread their language and ideals among the subjects that they ruled or colonized. Accordingly, there were attempts to “Anglicize” Indians as it was the case in British ruled India, or Magyarize Hungarians by the Maygar nobility in the Habsburg Empire (Anderson, 1999: chapter 3).

In the third stage, the concept of nationalism reached the colonial states; i.e. the ones that were occupied by the western powers. This created an interaction between the

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<sup>5</sup> According to Anderson a “Creoles” is “a person of (at least theoretically) pure European descent but born in the Americas (and by later extension anywhere outside Europe)”. Note: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 9<sup>th</sup> impression, (New York: Verso, 1999), p.47 note no. 1.

colonizers and the colonized peoples. In effect, this led to the spread of the idea of nationalism among the cultured groups in the colonial states. Thus, they had their own versions of nationalism and nationalist discourse (Anderson, 1999: chapter 10).

All of the above stages, according to Benedict Anderson's historical paradigm, were a product of the rise of print-press. This came as a result of a publishing revolution, where the vernacular languages took place in the western states and replaced Latin. However, such developments, along with the printed press, reached the colonial states. They were channels through which nationalist ideologues could disseminate their ideas.

As for the case of the Arabs, Anderson has little input because his paradigm for the development of colonial states' nationalism is based originally on his expertise in Southeast Asia (Anderson, 1999: pp. 163-164). He does indicate that certain Arab groups in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were indulged in the process of reviving classical Arabic via their printed press, in order to give rise to Arab nationalism.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Saadeh's Syria: An Imagined Community?**

In the case of Saadeh, the current research aims at questioning whether his ideology fits Anderson's historical narrative regarding the rise of nationalism. However, it is also important to note other features of "Syrian nationalism." One of the intriguing aspects is studying the aforesaid ideology by using what Eric Hobsbawm and others labeled as "invented traditions."<sup>7</sup> This enriches this research in order to find means through which

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<sup>6</sup> Anderson mistakenly assumes that such a revival was made by exclusively Arab Christians, which further research has proved to be inaccurate, note: C. Earnest Dawn, "From Ottomanism to Arabism: The Origin of an Ideology", in Albert Hourani (et al.) (eds.), *The Modern Middle East: A Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1<sup>st</sup> reprint, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), pp. 375-393

<sup>7</sup> Note: Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions", in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1983),

Saadeh attempted to inculcate in the minds of his partisans the idea of “Syrian nationalism.”

As Saadeh’s variant of nationalism emerged in the Arab Middle East, it is also vital to study his ideas through the concept of the “Arab attitude of mind” which was developed by the Bahraini Mohammad Jaber AlAnsary( AlAnsary, 1999). The latter clarified in the aforesaid region that writers and ideologues had indulged into three intellectual trends: The *Salafi*,<sup>8</sup> the compromising and the rejectionist<sup>9</sup>.

Saadeh, however, was a Greek orthodox Christian and could not be considered a *Salafi*, but he is either a compromiser or a radical. The current research will present, in due course, the category to which Saadeh’s ideology belonged. Also, it will be clarified to which of Benedict Anderson’s national categorizations he matched.

The literature which dealt with Saadeh’s ideology varies immensely in its empirical value. Labib Zuwiyya Yamak’s *The Syrian Social Nationalist Party: An Ideological Analysis*, (Yamak, 1969). is the most exhaustive academic study regarding this issue. Yamak provided an extensive amount of information about Saadeh and “Syrian nationalism.” He focused on the ideological side of Saadeh’s ideas. Yamak also concentrated more on the party rather than solely Saadeh’s intellectual activity. He utilized many sources, however, it did not clearly focus on the epistemological value of Saadeh’s ideas and their validity.

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<sup>8</sup> The word “Salafi” stems from the Arabic word “Salaf” which literally means the predecessors. In this context the subscriber to the Salafi doctrine is not referring to his/her biological or genealogical ancestors but rather to the ideological ones, as he claims to represent the continuity of their thought, mentality and lifestyle.

<sup>9</sup> These trends will be discussed thoroughly in Chapter1.

The current study also aims at utilizing the three abovementioned methods in order to comprehend and categorize Syrian nationalism, i.e. Anderson, Hobsbawm and AlAlansary. Therefore, this research aspires to surpass Yamak's analysis and conclusions regarding Saadeh's ideology.

Yamak pointed out many of the deficiencies in Saadeh's thought. Yamak indicated that the Saadeh was eclectic. On the other hand, he did not focus on important issues regarding Saadeh, such as the sources of his thought. Also, he made simple remarks regarding his target audience. He considered them to be mainly Christian (Yamak, 1969: pp.142-143). However, he did not provide clear reasons for the high Christian participation in Saadeh's party. This made his study rather focused on certain ideological sides of Saadeh's thought, mainly exposing his prejudices.

Other secondary sources were used in this study. They treated Saadeh's thought indirectly or discussed Saadeh in certain chapters. This was mainly the case with Patrick Seale's *The Struggle for Syria: A Study of Post War Arab Politics 1945-1958* (Seale, 1966). It provided an indispensable informative chapter about Saadeh. However, it lacked a full analysis of Saadeh's ideology. This is only natural since Seale was studying Saadeh as one part of his exhaustive study regarding the Syrian republic's history and the complexities of Arab politics.

Seale envisioned Saadeh and his party to be a voice of minorities within the region (Seale, 1966: p.71). He offered a concrete analysis of Saadeh's personal traits and life. Moreover, Seale was keen to analyze and illustrate how Saadeh politically developed. However, the ideological insights he provided, were extremely important. The same could be said about Laurent and Annie Charby, *siysah wa aqlyat fi AlShareq Al Adna*

(Politics and Minorities in the Near East). They placed great emphasis on Saadeh's affiliation with minorities in the region. Both authors indicated that Saadeh was a manifestation of minority anger against the Arab Muslim Sunni majority.

The works written by Saadeh's opponents are also important in studying his ideology. The most renowned of them is the Arab nationalist Sati AlHusri in his book *Defa'an 'an Al'urobah* (In Defense of Arabism).<sup>10</sup> He provided a fumed, yet sober response to Saadeh and his ideas. He envisioned Saadeh to be an inaccurate researcher in the realms of history and geography of "Greater Syria."

The abovementioned works, with the exception of Yamak's work, lack an exhaustive full comprehension of Saadeh's ideology. They only focus on one aspect of his ideology separately without offering a concentrated inclusive analysis. In this current research Saadeh's ideology will be studied in order to comprehend it from more than one angle.

In the first chapter of this study, early development of the Arab world and will be discussed in order to illustrate the origins of Saadeh's audience and the mindset that prevailed in the Arab Middle East. This will provide a clear understanding of the socio-economic background of the Arabs and their previous civilization.

Saadeh's life and political career will be discussed briefly in the second chapter of this study to clarify the roots of Saadeh's ideology and his personal temperament.

The third chapter will include Saadeh's definitions of the Syrian nation and their paradoxes. It mainly clarifies the development of Saadeh's thought and the underlying reasons for the changes in his definition of the Syrian nation which he aspired to.

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<sup>10</sup> Sati Alhusri, *Defa'an 'an Al'urobah* (in defense of Arabism), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Briut: Dar Al 'ilm Ilimalayeen, 1957).



In the fourth chapter, his ideas will be epistemologically discussed to evaluate their validity. This is important in order to reveal the value of his ideas and their scientific merits, since until recently, some historians and writers remain to be adherents of his ideology. They attempt to implement his ideas in different disciplines such as philosophy and music.

In the fifth chapter, Saadeh's efforts to implement his ideas will be fully discussed. For instance: How did he carve the way for a separate "Syria"? How did he view both Arabism and Islam and their relations to "Syria"? What kind of a nation did he aspire to? What was the "Syria" he dreamed of? These questions clarify Saadeh's national project and its implications within the region.

In chapter six, the sources of Saadeh's thought were discussed, such as, where did he acquire his ideas? What were the sources on which he relied on? Are there sources he used but did not cite due to his political considerations? These questions are designed to provide the origins of Saadeh's thought, so that it enables the researcher to clearly understand his thought and its place in modern Arab history.

The seventh and the last chapter will address Saadeh's audience. More precisely, who were his sympathizers? Why did his ideas strike a chord among certain layers within the Lebanese society? How did his political ideologies and views on economics attract certain writers? What were the methods he utilized to win partisans? what was Saadeh's legacy? Are his ideas obsolete? Finally, are they still in existence in the mindset of a group of contemporary writers and researchers?

In conclusion, Saadeh's "Syrian nationalism" is only a primary example in order to understand how current Arab ideologies came into existence. It provides researchers with

an understanding and tools on how minority groups within the region attempted to carve their places in the world around them. This is especially the case after the occurrence of western colonialism in the region. It is an opportunity to unveil the mindset that governs groups of contemporary Arabs.

## **Chapter 1**

### **The Arab World: An Historical Overview:**

The contemporary Arab intellectual scene has not emerged in void. It has a peculiar socio-economic setting, which will be discussed in the following paragraphs. As a matter of fact, it is important to discuss briefly the intellectual and socio-economic landscape that governed the Arab Middle East from antiquity and the ideological fluctuations which it had witnessed. In other words, what was the mindset which governed the region and how it remains to have a bearing on its inhabitants? Furthermore, what was the basis on which Saadeh had to place his ideology to appeal to the masses in the Arab Middle East? More importantly this chapter will furnish the study with a clear background for comprehending the intellectual environment that Saadeh had to face.

### **Islam and the Arabism: One Entity or Two?**

The early development of the Arab World can be traced to the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. after the success of the Islamic conquests in both the Middle East and North Africa. The new empire spread both the Arabic language and the Islamic faith. This process took centuries to reach its conclusion; hence it could be said that Islam did not become the dominant religion in the region until the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Arabic, however, took a different path; it had spread outside the Arabian Peninsula in the Near East before the rise of Islam. Yet, it did not become the native tongue of the whole region that is currently known as the Arab world until the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Hourani, 1992: 96-97).

Moreover, the formation of the Arab-Islamic Empire created a new civilization mainly due to its capability to absorb and harmonize the different elements which it inherited from previous civilizations(Hourani: 1992, 56). Furthermore, it has been

argued that Islam itself was a form of compromise between Judaism, eastern Christian monastic piety (embodied in the descriptions of divine judgment, heaven and hell) and pre-Islamic Arab ethics ( Hourani, 1992, 21).

Islam, according to one interpretation, was a midway between the far too detailed Jewish jurisprudence and the over generalized Christian doctrines. Also it stands amid the exclusiveness of the Jewish god and the complexity of its Christian counterpart. Thus, it was the synthesis of these two faiths( Alansary: 1999: 111-112).

Culturally speaking, the relationship between Islam and Arabism is of a complex nature. Clearly enough Islam was not exclusive to the Arabs, since it spread beyond the Arabic-speaking lands. In fact, the majority of contemporary Muslims are not Arabs.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, not all of the Arabs, including tribal clans, are Muslims. Notably Christian tribes that were still nomadic until the 19<sup>th</sup> century who encountered European travelers such as Charles Doughty who commented on such an incident by saying “It is strange to see the Christian religion administered in the tents of *Kedar*.”<sup>12</sup> Some of these tribes were only settled at the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century such as the ones in *AlKarak* district in today’s Jordan (Betts, 1976: 12).

Even in today’s Arab world some groups are considered to be Arab while they are not Muslims, while others are Muslims and yet they are not Arab. An example of the latter is

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<sup>11</sup> The Muslim population in the Middle East and North Africa constitutes only 20.1 % of the number of Muslims around the world. Note: “Mapping the Global Muslim Population,” ed. Tracey Miller, October 2009, PEW Research Center, Washington D.C., 7 March, 2010

<<http://pewforum.org/newassets/images/reports/Muslimpopulation/Muslimpopulation.pdf>>

<sup>12</sup> Charles M. Doughty cited in Robert Brenton Betts, *Christians of the Arab East: a Political Study*, (Athens: Lycabettus Press, 1975),p. 12

North Africa's Berbers.<sup>13</sup> Hence, it is established that Islam and Arabism are not one entity, but rather two with intersecting points.

#### **Arabia's Fluid Frontiers:**

The line between what Arabia and the surrounding regions of the Mesopotamia and "Greater Syria" (*Assham* hereafter) was historically fluid (Farouqi and Farouqi, 1986: 3-5). This was not a problem of accuracy among scholars, but rather of geography. A close glance at the map of the Near East reveals that the Arabian Peninsula "extends northward into the [Fertile] Crescent, widening its cavity and making it coalesce with the peninsula which it closely and continuously hugs." (Salibi, 2003: p.58). Hence, Arabia penetrates both Mesopotamia and *Assham* and separates them via *Badyat Assham* (the "Syrian desert") which is a mere extension of the Arabia's northern desert (Salibi, 2003: 61).

The political frontiers were never fixed due to foreign interventions or domestic developments. The region can be described as one unit having a desert center and sedentary peripheries. Therefore it is difficult to sketch borders dividing Mesopotamia, *Assham* and Arabia unless this is done based on arbitrary divisions (Salibi, 2003:3). Additionally, the desert was not a natural barrier. On the contrary it provided natural "highways" that connected the aforesaid peripheries together (Salibi, 2003:59). Moreover, the desert does not end at the Euphrates but extends all the way to the Tigris River making "lower Iraq" a northern extension of Arabia (Salibi, 2003:59). The same geographical reality is apparent in *Assham* as the desert "continues at many points beyond the first line of cities and towns fringing the coastal highlands from the east to

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<sup>13</sup> For a brief account on the Berbers in North Africa note: "Berbers." The Columbia Encyclopedia. 2008. Encyclopedia.com. 3 March.2010. <<http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Berbers.aspx>>

permeate these very highlands, in the notable case of southern Palestine as far west as the Mediterranean shore” (Salibi, 2003:59).

#### **The Arab Infiltration beyond Arabia:**

The abovementioned geographical reality had its implications. Hence, it was only natural that the ancient Arabs settled beyond the peninsula into *Assham* and Mesopotamia before the rise of Islam. Arab tribes had been present in both regions before and during the neo-Babylonian period of the seventh century B.C. (Zahran, 2001: 23). The Assyrian king Assurbanipal thought it necessary to bring down the Sabaean colonies in northern Arabia (namely Yarboud, Amman, Moab and Edom) because of their inhabitants' collaboration with the Babylonians. Hence, the aforementioned tribes had to take refuge in the Nabataean territories (Zahran, 2001: 23).

Arab tribes in *Assham* were also present during the Persian era, where an Arab mercenary in the Persian army had wounded Alexander the Great during the siege of Gaza (Zahran, 2001: 23). The Arab presence was obscured by other Near Eastern authors belonging to other peoples such as the Aramaeans and, at a later stage, the Greeks due to their division as separate tribes. The Aramaeans were the native inhabitants of the northern areas in *Assham* in the first millennium B.C. However, and after the demise of the Aramaean kingdoms in the second half of the same millennium, Arabs among other groups became more significant in the Near Eastern arena. By the Roman period, they became a major force on that scene, although they were overlooked by historians probably because of the persistence of Aramaean culture and language, as the latter was then the *lingua franca* of the Near East (Zahran, 2001: 24). Also, their political fragmentation played a central role in the vagueness of their presence. Thus, they were

known by their tribal or territorial names, such as the Nabataeans, the Osroeni, Emesans, Hatrans, Ituraeans and the Safaites who spoke their Arabic dialects along with Aramaic. These groups controlled a large part of the area from the Euphrates to the Nile, and could have been the natural successors of the Seleucid and Ptolemaic kingdoms. However, their control was weakened by the Roman conquest, at the end of the first century B.C. and the early first century A.D. Accordingly, the Arabs had to wait for seven centuries until the Islamic conquests to control the region (Zahran, 2001: 24-25). The rise and the expansion of the Arabs in the Near East, from the end of the first millennium B.C. to the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D., were only natural since their migrations from the Peninsula continued constantly unlike their Jewish and Aramaean Counterparts (Athamina, 2001: 1).

In terms of the economic situation in pre-Islamic Arabia, the economic modes of production differed immensely from one region to another. However, it is noted that most of the Arabian inhabitants were sedentary peoples. They were either peasants in the oases and in southern Arabia, or craftsmen and merchants in the Arabian cities, along with the pastoral nomads (bedouins) who constituted a minority in the Arabian Peninsula (Hourani, 1992: 10 and Fernandez-Armesto, 2001:327-238).

Interestingly as Felipe Fernandez-Armesto notes: "Arab civilization, indeed, was a seaboard civilization in a double sense. For the desert was a kind of a sea – a trackless, uninhabited, apparently rootless expanse, ever coiling and reshaping with the wind. It has its islandlike oases and its exploitable resources-though these are sparser than the sea- but it remains above all an obstacle to be crossed" (Fernandez-Armesto, 2001: 328). Hence, it is of little wonder that the ancient Arabs called their camels, the means of their journeys "The ships of the desert."

Contrary to what many may assume about Arabia, its southern part was a fertile area due to the seasonal rainfalls it witnesses. It produced *aromata* such as myrrh and spices. The southern Arabians needed to market their products and the ones they imported from India and China. This was achieved through their trade with North Africa, the Levant and Europe (Hitti, 2002: 14).

### **Arab Civilizational Development before Islam:**

Although the history of the Arabs in the pre-Islamic age remains vague, a brief survey of their cultural development will be provided herein, based on their location in Arabia. In Yemen in southern Arabia it is noted that the southern Arabian states were commercial not military ones (Hitti, 2002: 50). This was only natural since Arabia was located between Asia, Africa and Europe which encouraged the ancient Arabs to indulge in maritime trade (AlAli, 1985: 94). The Minaean state (1300 B.C.) controlled the trade routs between northern and southern Arabia, and its rule has extended to the northern Hejaz region (Assfour, 1981: 251-252). Their trade even reached the Greek island of Delos, as documented by an inscription on the island dated to the second half of the second century B.C. The Minaeans also traded with North Africa and the regions that today are Spain and France, as their inscriptions in these regions have shown. Hence, the ancient Arab Mediterranean trade was not exclusively conducted by the Phoenicians, as some historians previously supposed (AlAli, 1987: 90). Also, the state of Hadramout (1020 B.C.- 300 B.C.) could be noted which had many temples and water dams (Salim, n.d., 76-77).



Another Southern Arabian civilization is that of the Sabaeans (800 B.C.). In its heyday its kings were able to extend their hegemony over all of southern Arabia (Hitti, state was distinguished for its construction of water dams which covered many valleys in order to hold rainfall water (Salim, n.d.: 95). The most renowned of these dams is the *Ma'rib* dam which was, in Philip Hitti's words, "a remarkable engineering feat, [that] together with other public works of the Sabaeans, reveal to us a peace-loving society highly advanced not only in commerce but in technical accomplishment as well" (Hitti, 2002: 54). The older remains of the dam go back to the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. The southern Arabians, in general, monopolized the trade route connecting the Levant and Europe with India till the early centuries B.C. They were involved in maritime trade since ancient times, and had mastered the routes of the Indian Ocean and were seafarers of distinguished skill, since they knew the cycle of the monsoons well (Hitti, 2002: 49). The southern Arabians were also known for their skill in building architecture, which was manifested in the monuments they left and the ones reported by ancient historians. One example is the palace of *Ghumdan*, which was built by the Hymirites to protect them from bedouin raids. Two Arab geographers were capable of seeing its ruins after the start of Islamic times: AlHmadani (954 A.D.) and Yaqut AlHamawi (1179-1229 A.D.). They provided a description of the palace where it had 20 stories, each 10 cubits high, thus "the first skyscraper in recorded history" (Hitti, 2002: 57).

The Yemenis were also appreciated for their skill in making weapons. Hence, "Yemeni swords" and the "Yemeni shields" were a source of inspiration for Arabian poets who praised their high qualities in their poems (Belyaev, 1973: 92-93). The Yemenis were also adept at making textiles and in tanning animal skins (Belyaev, 1973:

92-94). Yemen was known for its agricultural products. They grew myrrh, frankincense and grapes, and planted plenty of grapevines as their ancient texts had revealed (Mou'ti, 2003: 112-113 and 117-118).

The author of *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (50-60 A.D.) described the Arabians' wealth by saying "No nation seems to be wealthier than the Sabaeans and Gerhaeans, who are the agents for everything that falls under the name of transport from Asia and Europe. It is they who have made Syria rich in gold and who have provided profitable trade and thousands of other things to Phoenician enterprise" (cited in Fernandez-Armesto, 2001: 329-330).

In the eastern side of the Arabian Peninsula was a prosperous civilization in the Arabian (Persian) Gulf. The major area therein is the costal one known in our present times as *AlQateef*. According to the famous Greek historian Herodotus, who visited the Levant in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., he was told by the Phoenician elders in Tyre that their ancestors originally came from Arabian shores of the Red Sea. (Salibi, 2003: 71). Yet, and Curiously enough, it is noted that the correlation between the names of the ancient Phoenicians and the Arabian coast is in the western side of the Arabia not the eastern one on the Red Sea. First there is "*Sour*" (Tyre) on the Omani coast. Also *AlJubail* in Saudi Arabia with the same name as *Jubeil* (Byblos) located north of Beirut. Additionally, there is the island of '*Arad* in today's Bahrain which has a very similar name to the island of *Arwad* near Syria's coast (AlMussalam, n.d.: 68).

In the third millennium B.C., Dilmun (probably today's Bahrain, but certainly in the Gulf) started to become a trading intersection point between Mesopotamia and India (Fernandez-Armesto, 2001: 49). This was natural since the Arabian Gulf was the only

access to the sea for ancient Mesopotamia through which it was able to acquire its needs of raw materials, merchandise and metals (AlAhmad, 1985:44). For the Mesopotamians Dilmun was also a renowned for its onions, dates (known as "*Solom Dilmun*") and perfumes (Fernandez-Armesto, 17, 256, 265). The prosperity of the "Dilmuni" trade was apparent since archeologists found one weight unit in the famous ancient Syrian city of Ebila called "Shekel Dilmun" (Mou'ti, 2003: 260-261). Furthermore, Dilmun was known to be a center for building trade ships according to classical writers and ancient Mesopotamian myths (Al Ahmad, 1985: 204). The Dilmuni ships were of a large size and carried different goods to Mesopotamia; the most prominent of which was copper (Al Ahmad, 1985: 212 and 242-243). The annals of the eminent Acadian king Senharib reveal the Dilmunis' skill in making bronze containers and carriages (Al Ahmad, 1985: 281). Thus, it is of little wonder that the Dilmunis were renowned for making an effective ax called the "Dilmuni ax" ( Mou'ti: 2004, 113). Ancient inscriptions and classical sources have also shown that cotton was grown in Bahrain and *Zufar* (Oman), and was exported to other regions (Mou'ti, 2004: 113).

In Oman, it is noted that it was known to ancient Mesopotamians as "*Magan*," and provided them with copper and frankincense.(Mou'ti, 2004: 267). At the end of the third millennium B.C. *Magan* became part of the Arabian Gulf's maritime trade between India and Mesopotamia, and had a reputation for smelting copper (Fernandez-Armesto, 2001: 329). The people of Magan built their boats from tamarisk and other tree trunks. This skill is still practiced till our present times, thus refuting the assumption that Arabia lacked the proper trees to build boats and ships (Shihab, 2001: 75). As noted above,

*Magan* was known for its ports, such as *Mukha* and its coastal cities like *Sahar* and *Duba*, which held annual markets (Shihab, 2001: 95 and 97-98).

A sign of the expansion of Arabian trade was when the ancient Greek merchants reached eastern Africa and reported that the Arabian merchants had already established their settlements and trade centers there before their arrival (Shihab, 2001:110). It is very important herein to note that Ibn Khaldun's (the famous 14<sup>th</sup> century Arab historian) supposition that Arabs were afraid of the sea and relied on foreigners for their maritime transport and expansions, which was adopted by many researchers, is inaccurate (Shihab, 2001: 110). Furthermore, even some bedouins were involved in maritime activities and were not afraid of the sea, as it was presumed. They would extract pearls in one season and would return to raising cattle in the next one. This was particularly the case during extremely dry years (Shihab: 95-96).

The most eminent Omani contribution to civilization was their creation of the "*Aflaj*" (subsurface water channels) which were a system of wells connected by underground channels. This system was acquired by the ancient Persians who, in turn, passed it back to the Muslim Arabs. The latter dispersed it throughout Africa and the Iberian subcontinent; later it was introduced to southern America (Mou'ti, 2004: 96-97).

The states established by northern pre-Islamic Arabs were mainly based on caravan cities. This is particularly the case in Palmyra, Nabataean Petra, Hatra and even Mecca. They were cities that relied heavily on the commerce between southern Arabia (with native, Indian and far eastern merchandise), Persia and the Mediterranean. This led such cities to depend mainly on their relationships with the surrounding nomadic tribes. They

worshiped similar deities such as *Allat* and *al'uzza*, and had sacred religious sites, to which they and the surrounding tribes paid homage to.<sup>14</sup>

Mecca can be perceived as the last of these cities to be captured by foreign forces, mainly Roman and Persian. But even Mecca was attacked by the surrounding states, particularly Byzantium, and was captured by Allius Gallius in his expedition to Yemen and was later attacked by the Hibachi state several years prior to the birth of Prophet Muhammad (AlAli, 2000: 131-132). It was natural that Mecca became of important, since it was a point of intersection of the trade routes between Persia, the Levant and Yemen (AlAli, 2000: 13). Moreover, it became more important after the fall of the Hymirite state in the fifth century A.D. and was a vital trade point for the Byzantines after the fall of southern Arabia under the influence of the Persian Empire (AlAli, 2000: 132).

Furthermore, the entire Arabian Peninsula became under severe competition between the Byzantines and the Persians in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. This struggle had an economic base as both empires sought to control its trade routes and attain its products (e.g., *aromata*, frankincense, etc.).<sup>15</sup> Hence, the rise of Islam can be regarded as a response to this struggle for the control over the peninsula by both empires, where a group of Arabian merchants with their tribal allies led a movement through which they were able to retain their control over the peninsula's trade routes. This process was developed via the Islamic

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<sup>14</sup> For further details note: Hashem Yehya AlMalah, *Al Waseet fi Tarikh Al 'Arb Qabl Al Islam* (History of the Arabs before Islam), (Mousel: University of Mousel, 1994).

<sup>15</sup> For an excellent study regarding this issue note: Shukran Kharboutli, *Shibh Jazeerat Al'Arab Wa Alsera' Aldowali 'alyeha: Min AlQarn Alrabe' Hata Thouhour Al Islam* (The International Struggle over the Arabian Peninsula: Form the 4<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. until the Rise of Islam), (Damascus: Dar Raslan, 2007).

conquests of *Assham* and Mesopotamia, and briefly later, in Egypt and North Africa (Abu AlRub: 44-45).

It is more than revealing that the early champions of Islam, such Prophet Mohammad and his companions (Omar, Othman, Abu-Bakr, his first wife Khadeejah and others), were all merchants. Thus, Islam was not a result of a nomadic environment but an urban merchant one. This was further developed after the Arabs' establishment of their empire after the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. The ruling class in the new civilization was not one of feudal lords as it was the case in Europe but rather of what Samir Amin calls as "Merchant Worriers" (Amin, 1978b: 6).

The Islamic lands had undergone severe wars and invasions by the Mongols and the Crusaders. Yet, the mode of production which prevailed in the Arab lands fluctuated between mercantilism and feudalism. The Arab merchant class's wealth was mainly derived from the transit trade, between Europe and the eastern world of China and India, hence making the Arab world a point of intersection between these regions. This situation depended on the Arabs' control over the sea trade routes, thus causing severe competition with Byzantium and the western European states (Italian city states, Normans, Franks etc.). Thus, the Arab merchants' success heavily depended on their military strength, which resulted in their control over the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean during the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. This control was reassumed in the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, hence making the Mediterranean an "Islamic lake" at that era (Ismail, 1988: 447-448).

This Islamic "bourgeois renaissance," however, was short lived because of both internal and external factors. On the internal level, the Arab merchant class was closely associated with the state and its military expansions and, unlike its European counterpart,

lacked the autonomy needed to create a “bourgeois revolution.” This class was also indulged in importing and exporting luxurious products for the ruling aristocracy, rather than the other classes (Ismail, 1988: 67).

Since the Arab merchant class was dependent on international commerce it was in harmony with the state and was incapable of breaking away from its grip, which is contrary to the western European experience. Accordingly, once the European states were able to regain Andalusia and their control over the Mediterranean Sea trade, Arab commerce suffered from some serious reversion. On the other hand, many members of the Arab commercial class were non-Muslims, and since the Arab society was of a religious nature at that era, this was a serious barrier to the solidarity of the Arab merchants. Also, the Islamic lands lacked the necessary exploitation of raw materials to indulge into larger industrial enterprises, which hindered the Arab World from witnessing an industrial revolution as it was the case in Europe (Ismail, 1988: 470-471). The Arab territories also suffered from violent attacks by nomadic tribes whether Arab, Kurdish or Turkish. This, in turn, hindered the development of both Arab commerce and industry (Ismail, 1988: 547).

The Islamic feudal system was significantly different from the western European one. For example, the feudal land was not attained by the feudal lords as their own property, but as a prize from the state, hence making the feudal class unstable and exposed to constant changes in its members resulting from once the state deciding to regain its “gift” (Ismael, 1990: 22). Also the feudal lords in the Islamic lands were not resident in their territories. They held control over these lands while their places of residence were in the cities (Ismail, 1990: 23). This resulted in making the Arab economy feeble and rather

“feudal” with a peripheral commercial class. Also there was a clear lack of a stable rule amongst the feudal lords in the Arab territories who were in severe competition with each other, hence, making the Arab society both unstable and weak, while suffering from a severe case of despotism.

### **The Intellectual Scene:**

The reflections of the socio-economic situation on the intellectual level were uncharacteristic in the sense that it created what Mohammad Jaber AlAnsary prefers to call as the “Arab attitude of Mind.” In this context, and according to AlAnsary’s categorization, one can generalize three intellectual trends that dominated the Arab intellectual arena:

- 1) The “*Salafi*”<sup>16</sup> trend: This trend tends to be rigid as it closely attaches itself to the Islamic doctrines in the manner which they were articulated in the Islamic tradition; mainly prophet Mohammad’s “*Hadith*” and the Koran. It represents a trend that is suspicious of any non-Islamic thoughts or ideas, labeling them “foreign” if not “heretic”, and accordingly rejecting them. This line of thinking seems to flourish under cases of crises and defeat, as it inspires to maintain the unity of the Islamic group (*Jama’a*) in response to the foreign threats (AlAnsary, 1999: 25-25).
- 2) The Compromising trend (*Tawfiqi*): This ideological line tends to be the one which attempts to reconcile influences originating from non-Islamic sources with Islamic dogma. This inclination flourishes at times of prosperity as was the case

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<sup>16</sup> The word “*Salafi*” stems from the Arabic word “*Salaf*” which literally means the predecessors. In this context the subscriber to the *Salafi* doctrine is not referring to his biological or genealogical ancestors but rather to the ideological ones. He claims to represent the continuity of their thought, mentality and lifestyle.



in the early Abbasid times. It represents the Islamic tendency to accept foreign influences, although it conducts this absorption of new or "alien" ideas by attempting to reconcile them with traditional Islamic doctrines. Thus, conducting a compromise between the "new" ideas and the older ones. Accordingly, this creates a form of synthesis between the old and the new ideologies which is novel in the sense that the compromise is neither the old ideas as presented by their sources (e.g., ancient Greek philosophy) nor do the Islamic doctrines remain untouched as the society of the faithful is led to believe (AlAnsary, 1999: 26-28).

- 3) The Rejectionist trend: This inclination is the most misrepresented one in Arab-Islamic civilization. It represents the ideologies and concepts that have been rejected by the orthodox Islamic thought. However, it represents far too many intellectual currents that have the sole common denominator of being unorthodox. It involves mystic sects such as the Ismaeilis and their successors, such as the Druzes and Alwaites. On the other hand, it includes thinkers that were subscribers of materialist ideas, which did not accept metaphysical concepts such as Ibn AlRawendi and today's Arab leftist thinkers. The assumption that all unorthodox doctrines are of a similar origin and comprising the same ideas, was only the orthodox thinkers' construction of a common enemy that represents an attack on the god-fearing group of believers. In other words, it represents a convenient excuse for the orthodox ideology to claim that it has remained pure throughout the ages, since it faces the same enemies. Also such labels against the opponents of the orthodox line of thinking serve another purpose which is to discredit them and

distort their ideas by associating them with older opponents of Islam which are held with contempt by the Islamic masses' imagination (AlAnsary, 1999: 28-34).

The successes of the abovementioned three intellectual trends their dependent on the socio-economic basis which ruled the Arab-Islamic civilization at that era. Hence, at the heyday of the aforesaid civilization the compromising trend was dominant. This was manifested in the Arab translation and utilization of the ancient Greek philosophy and science. However, during the times where feudalism had succeeded the *Salafi* trend seemed to flourish, since it does not include any innovative intellectual attempts. The third rejectionist ideological movement remained to exist always as there were continuously individuals or groups that rejected orthodox Islam (AlAnsary, 1999: 43).

Such ideologies were only the natural product of the abovementioned socio-economic realities. In this sense, the weak Arab mercantile class was not able to detach itself from the ruling class and the state. Thus, it was only capable of attempting to reconcile its ideas with the ones adopted by the Islamic theocratic state, as it was the case of the *Mo'tazelah* in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries (AlAnsary, 1999: 107-143).

The abovementioned intellectual scene is of a vital importance. It reveals the intellectual background of the modern nationalists' in the Arab Middle East, including the subject of this research, Antoun Saadeh. Accordingly, it illustrates the ideological atmosphere through which he had to initiate to pursue his nationalist ideas. As it will be clarified, in due course, the compromising Arab intellectual trend was also present in the realm of Syrian nationalism. It is a reality which hindered its course and success.

It is important to comprehend, that Saadeh had to face an audience that was familiar with abovementioned eclectic ideas and ideals, particularly the Muslim inhabitants of the

region. This caused immense effects on their attempt to carve new identities in a new modern world.

Saddeh was a product of the compromising "Arab attitude of mind." This in itself hindered both the progress of his ideas and the clarity needed for the establishment of sound "scientific" theories of identity. Saadeh was also compromising in his ideas, and unlike the common perception of him, he was not a revolutionary thinker. Hence making him an opposite as the ones humanity has witnessed at the age of enlightenment in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Furthermore, Saadeh was preoccupied by a dilemma that arguably occupies the minds of contemporary Arab writers. It manifests itself in two important questions: who are we? And what is it to be done? Such questions, were not innocent at any level, since they did implicitly, indicate certain social groups which have nurtured Saadeh's ideology. The main aim is to find how he responded and acted against the eclectic environment which he faced to both develop and convey his ideology.

## Chapter 2

### **Antoun Saadeh's Life and Political Activity:**

#### **Saadeh's Early Life: Ambiguity, Enthusiasm and the Road to the Party:**

Antoun Saadeh's place and date of birth remain uncertain. The most widely spread story claims that he was born in *AlShweir* village in Mount Lebanon (Assabi', 1999: 119). Yet, according to other sources this was not the case. They claimed that Saadeh was actually born in Brazil not Lebanon (Seale, 1966: 64). This uncertainty is maximized by the fact that one of Saadeh's sympathizers revealed that his baptism certificate states that he was born on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July, 1904, while Saadeh maintained that he was born on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March, in the same year (Assabi', 1999: 119).

On the other hand, there is little doubt about his origins. He was born to a Greek Orthodox family from *AlShweir* (Assabi', 1999: 112). His family was a branch of the Mujais clan. One of its members, Salim Mujais, considered its origins to be obscure. He rejected the story of its members coming originally from the *Hawran* plain in the eastern part of today's Syrian Arab republic (Mujais, 2004: 23-24). In a sense, Mujais seems to have attempted to emphasize Saadeh's idea that the inhabitants of the "Fertile Crescent" were a mixture of races. He avoided the history of *AlShweir* prior to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which may further illuminate the racial composition of the "*Shwieris*." He admitted that Mount Lebanon was socially divided among the Arab tribal division between the northern Arabs, the Qausees, and their southern counterparts, the Yemeni factions (Mujais, 2004: 22). This indicates that they were following the Arab tribal divisions in the Arab Middle East.

*AlShweir* was divided like many other villages in the Arab Middle East, into two clans: the Mujais, an Antiochian Greek orthodox clan and their compatriots, the Sawayas. The latter turned into Greek Catholicism in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and claimed to be descendants of the crusaders. This led to consistent competition and rivalry between both sides (Mujais, 2004: 24).

Consequently, there are two different accounts regarding Saadeh's life: one where he and his partisans maintained that he was born in *AlShweir* village. This could be considered to prove the authenticity of his "Syrian" credentials as the son of the "Syrian" land. The other one was by learned scholars such as Patrick Seale, which claimed that he was born in Brazil. Hence, in this research his early life will not be discussed. Instead his political career in Lebanon will be the main task of this chapter.

Saadeh arrived in the late 1920(s) in *Assham* region, and worked in the Damascus newspaper *Al-Ayyam*. At that time Syria was suffering under the French mandate after the destruction of the short lived Arab kingdom led by the Hashemite King Faisal and a group of Arab nationalists in Damascus. Thus, its intellectual atmosphere was suffering from serious handicaps, which led Saadeh to move to Beirut. There he found a cosmopolitan environment and a more suitable place for the dissemination of his ideas (Seale, 1966: 64).

Saadeh was fueled with the idea of Syrian patriotism through his father Dr. Khalil Saadeh who was an immigrant to Latin America and both the teacher and mentor of Antoun.<sup>17</sup> This was important, since the latter did not attend any university and his educational level did not surpass that of a secondary school (Yamak, 1969: 53).

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<sup>17</sup> The roots of Saadeh's thought are discussed in chapter 6.

Saadeh did not have any money or profession. Thus, he had to support himself with great difficulty by giving private lessons in German at the American University of Beirut (A.U.B hereafter) (Seale, 1966: 53). There, he was able to make his way to the staff common room where he talked for hours about his nationalist visions. He received certain amount of ridicule due to the stubbornness he displayed while defending his ideas. Also he went swimming with some students, where he later found the first group of followers (Seale, 1966: 53).

Saadeh began his intellectual activity when he began writing articles from time to time which was complemented by giving talks to university students in order to disseminate his thoughts and beliefs (Yamak: 1969: 54).

#### **Saadeh in the Political Arena:**

After realizing the failure of relying on only writing articles, Saadeh began in 1931, considering to establish a political organization. Hence, he started recruiting students at the AUB. He began to organize his party very discreetly to avoid public attention and distant from the grip of the French authorities. He enlisted six members, Two from Trans-Jordan (Jordan), while the others were Lebanese. At a later stage he was not convinced of the allegiance of two of the aforesaid partisans, thus he dissolved the organization, only to reestablish it with the other four recruits under the name *AlHizb AlQawmy ALSury* (The Syrian National Party) (Yamak, 1969: pp.54-55).

By 1935 the organization had many members at the AUB. Thus, Saadeh was able to enlist several thousand partisans in both Syria and Lebanon. The party was of a rigid hierarchal organization. It emerged from the underground when it held its first plenary conference, and attracted the attention of the French mandate's authorities. Accordingly,

the latter reacted by arresting Saadeh and other party leaders on the 10<sup>th</sup> of September, 1935 (Seale, 1966: 57).

After being sentenced to four months in jail, Saadeh wrote his first and only book entitled *Noshou' Al'Ummum* (The Genesis of Nations). In this work, he elaborated his ideas on nationalism in general with some references regarding "Greater Syria," along with his commentaries on the principles of his party (Yamak, 1969: 57).

After his release, Saadeh was arrested once more in 1936, on the account of assaulting several journalists that launched a campaign against him, which was proven in court. Thus, he was sentenced to four months in jail. He was released based on several conditions. One of which was to give Lebanon's president his guarantee that the party will work on the "national" unity, but not political unity between Syria and Lebanon (Yamak, 1969: 57).

During the following two years the relationship between the party and the authorities remained being relaxed at times and tensed at others. Also, the mandate's concerns regarding the party became less so, as two sectarian parties emerged: First, the *Kata'ib* (Phalangist) party, which represented the Maronites, the largest Lebanese Christian sect. It subscribed to Lebanese/Phoenician nationalism. Second, the *Nejadah*, which adhered to Arab nationalism, and was particularly dominant in the Muslim Sunni circles. Yet Saadeh continued his efforts to overcome both sides without much success (Yamak, 1969: 57).

### **In Latin America:**

Saadeh decided to travel to the Americas to gain the support of the "Syrian community" for his cause (Yamak, 1969: 57-59). Before reaching the Americas, Saadeh stopped in Italy and Germany. This raised more suspicion by the French authorities concerning him being an agent for the German Nazi regime. Thus, the French authorities accused Saadeh of broadcasting over Radio Berlin during the Second World War, without any concrete evidence, since he reached Latin America before the outbreak of the war (Seale, 1966: 69). On the other hand, according to the British Foreign Office documents, Saadeh did receive monetary aid from Fascist Italy in the years prior to the 1930(s) (Shu'eeb, 2005: 245).

Saadeh first visited Brazil, and then he went to Argentina where the party gained the support of a small active group of "Syrian" emigrants (Yamak, 1969: 59-60). Yet, the war took him by surprise and he was unable to communicate with his party members in Lebanon (Seale, 1966: 60).

### **Saadeh Reestablishes "Syrian" Nationalism:**

Saadeh returned to Lebanon on March 1947, only to realize that the party leaders took a different path as they were concerned with the Lebanese internal affairs. They changed the name of the party in 1944 and received their organization's license from the authorities under the title *AlHizb AlQawmy* (The National Party), without any reference to Syria (Yamak, 1969: 61).

Saadeh gave a speech upon his return, where he reiterated his original ideas, and considered Lebanon as only part of the greater "Syrian" nation. This caused considerable concern to the Lebanese authorities, whom their country gained independence in



1943. The latter issued a memorandum for his arrest after he did not appear in front of the *Sûreté Générale*, in fear for his safety, leading Saadeh to live as a fugitive. During this time he launched a severe attack against both Lebanese and Arab nationalist ideas that resulted in boosting the party's prestige. This made him win a few Arab nationalists to his cause, yet he was incapable to penetrate the bulk of the Muslim community in Lebanon (Yamak, 1969: 61).

Saadeh initiated a cleansing campaign against some party leaders, whom he considered to have deviated from the initial party doctrines, namely Ni'meh Thabit, Ma'mun Ayas and the new rising party ideologue, Fayez Sayegh (Yamak, 1969: 61). The latter had written a book titled *Ila 'Ayen?* (Whither?), in which he criticized Saadeh's new visions regarding adding other territories to the envisioned "Syrian" nation. Thus, indicating that he was not the only person in the party who had a change of heart during the years Saadeh spent abroad.<sup>18</sup>

On June 1949, armed clashes took place between Saadeh's partisans, and their other Christian rivals, the Phalangists. The latter launched an attack on the Syrian Social Nationalist Party's newspaper offices and printing works in the capital Beirut. The Syrian National party members claimed that this was an attempt to assassinate Saadeh with the encouragement of the government (Seale: 69). Although Saadeh was left unhurt by the incident, he fled to the Syrian republic after arresting some of his party members, which had its first *coup d'état* on March, 1949. There, a military regime was installed led by Husny Alza'im, who had himself "elected" as the president of the country and invited Saadeh to join forces (Seale, 1966: 70).

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<sup>18</sup> This issue shall be discussed in the next chapter.

### **Saadeh from Party Leader to a Revolutionary:**

According to Patrick Seale, Saadeh and Za'im found each other to be an instrument for their purposes: Za'im considered that Saadeh could undermine the latter's personal enemy, the Lebanese Sunni Prime minister Riadh AlSulh, who he suspected of plotting against the new military regime in Syria. In fact, AlSulh was a friend of the symbol of the previous Syrian regime, Shukri Al-Quwatli. Saadeh thought that Za'im might be the vehicle for his ideology and party to rule Lebanon (Seale, 1966: 70).

Za'im provided Saadeh with arms who announced "the First Popular Social Revolution." The party members attacked several small isolated police posts in the Lebanese mountains and the Biqa' valley on the first week of July 1949. They suffered from a miserable defeat. Later the party's leadership claimed that this was a tactic to draw the Lebanese government forces in order launch a massive attack elsewhere (Seale, 1966: 70).

Saadeh fled to Syria once more, where Za'im had betrayed him and gave surrendered him to the Lebanese authorities. He received a military trial *sitting in Camera*, and was sentenced to death within 24 hours and was executed by a military squad on the 8<sup>th</sup> of July, 1949 (Seale, 1966: 69).

### **Saadeh's Temperament:**

On the psychological and personal level, the persons that knew Saadeh, according to Seale, described him as "an intellectual dictator: authoritarian, magnetic, immensely fluent, with brilliant superficial knowledge of great many subjects. He had strong views and knew where he stood on every single issue; no possibility of convincing him in argument. He gave his disciples no alternative save conversation or expulsion from the

party. Even resignation was not tolerated: Saadeh would issue a pre-dated decree expelling the culprit, an ugly reason would be fabricated and a press campaign launched to blacken his name" (Seale, 1966: 69).

Seale added that also his victims "continued to venerate him. If however, his movement is to be judged by results, it was a failure and his political judgment appears less commanding than his intellect" (Seale, 1966: 69).

## **Chapter 3**

### **In Search of Saadeh's "Syria":**

#### **Saadeh's Definition of "Syria" and its Paradoxes:**

Benedict Anderson had asserted, nations were generally the product of the socio-economic developments in the late 18<sup>th</sup>, the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, not from time immemorial as some nationalists assume. Saadeh considered such entities as "imagined communities," defining a nation as "an imagined political community, and imagined as inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson, 1999: 6). He elaborated that a nation is "imagined because the members of even the smallest nation never knew most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them" (Anderson, 1999:6). Hence, in accordance with the topic of this study, the following question arises: what was the "Syrian" nation which Saadeh rigorously advocated?

The concept of the "Syrian nation" seems to have developed in Saadeh's mind during his migration years in Brazil, (Yamak, 1969, 53) as he mentioned in the first major principle of his party that "Syria is for the Syrians and the Syrians are a complete nation" (Saadeh, n.d.: 5). However, before reaching to unveil what Saadeh meant by the "Syrian nation" the origins of the name "Syria" and its religious, historical and cultural implications needs to be studied in order to realize the manner through which Saadeh understood and imagined the aforesaid entity.

### **The Origins of Syrian Nationalism:**

Initially when considering the name "Syria," Saadeh maintained that it was derived from the name of the old Mesopotamian empire "Assyria" (Saadeh, 1998:62). On the other hand, it is noted that a historian sympathetic to the concept of "Syria," Philip Hitti, had asserted that "Syria" was not even a native term as it is Greek in form (Hitti, 2002, Vol.1: 157).

According to Hitti, and unlike Saadeh's claim, the term "Syria" has no Etymological relationship with "Assyria." He clarified at the same time that some classical writers wrote incorrectly about "Syrians," assuming that they were "Assyrians." Hitti also illustrated that the old Semitic civilizations and peoples in ancient times used their Semitic terms of "Syria" only to include parts of the region, such as the Babylonian district called "*Suri*." It was only at the Greek times and beyond that the term was broadly used ( Hitti, 2002a, Vol.1:62). It is also important to note that from classical writers' perspective, "Syria" did not constitute anything more than "western fringes of what was reckoned to be Arabia, between the first line of cities and the coast." (Salibi, 2003:61). Furthermore, the name "Syria" did not have a political meaning except under the Roman rule, with its capital Antioch. Otherwise "Syria" was a geographical expression like Mesopotamia and Arabia (Salibi, 2003:61).

The name "Syria" was expanded to include all of *Assham* region and its inhabitants after the spread of the name "Syrian" to distinguish between the Aramaic Christians from their pagan compatriots (Abduh, 1997: 30-31). Hence, they became known as "Syrians" and their language as "Syriac," since they adopted the Aramaic dialect of the city of Edessa (called by the same name) as the language of their church and liturgy. However,

the Greeks named the land of Aram as "Syria" as it was previously asserted (Hitti, 2002 a:vol.1: 170-171).

This was only a natural development, due to the fact that Christianity emerged from Southern "Syria" (i.e. Palestine). Thus, the word Aramaic was used to refer to pagans, while the term "Syrian" was the equivalent of Christians (Abduh, 1997: 34). This was manifested mostly when the land of Aram was translated in both the Greek and Latin versions of the Bible under the name "Syria" (Alabrashy, 1984: 58). This reality had its implications, which was evident in the fact that Syriac literature has an extremely vigorous eastern Christian inclination (Alabrashy, 1984: 61).

As the name "Syria" was expanded in the past as previously mentioned, however, it shrunk during the Islamic times, after being arabized into "*Suryah*." The latter included the area between the middle part of the Orontes River in the vicinity of the cities of Homs and Hama in today's Syrian republic (Salibi, 2003: 61-62). Hence, it is clear that the name "Syria" was mobile and changed over time. At times, it included all of *Assham*, while at other eras it only included parts of the region. Furthermore, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, "geographical Syria" was an expression with different implications. In its narrowest sense, it referred to the Ottoman province of Damascus. However, in its widest definition it included *Assham* region. In the midway between these two definitions, "geographical Syria" comprised *Assham* while excluding separately or jointly Mount Lebanon and Palestine (Spanglo, 1969: 45-62). This illustrates its historicity and debunks Saadeh's idea of a "Syrian" nation from time immemorial. (Saadeh, n.d.: 128).

The Christian element in Syriac literature and its uses in the liturgy of some Christian churches in the Arab Middle East, such as the Maronite church, had its implications.

Christianity kept the name "Syria" in existence till the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It gradually began competing with the Arabic name, *Bilad Assham*. However, this took place after the fall of the Near East under the influence of the western European powers, who did not use the term *Assham*, but rather "Syria" for the region, since it was the biblical name as mentioned earlier. Hence the Christian inhabitants of *Assham*, began to use the new term "Syria" in the form of "*Suriyya*" rather than the traditional Arabic term, "*Suriyah*," as a result of the European hegemony that had started taking place. With the revival Christian Arabic literature, the former term had spread among the Muslims in the region, following the footsteps of the Christians and displacing by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the traditional Arabic name, *Bilad Assham* (Salibi, 2003: 62).

At that same era, certain "national" sentiments began to surface. Thus, some Arab Christians, such as Butrus AlBustani, began to illustrate a sense of belonging to a specified area, "*Suriyya*," yet maintaining their allegiance to the Ottoman Empire. In 1875, a few young Christians adhered to the circle of Bustani initiated a secret society, in which they called for an autonomous rule in Syria and Lebanon, and making Arabic the official language therein (Hourani, 1970: 274).

The society had little political impact, but according to Albert Hourani, it illustrated a "political consciousness" among the Christians in *Assham*. However, the "nation" or "homeland" which they aspired to, significantly differed, as some had sentiments directed towards an autonomous "Syria" while others sought an "independent Lebanon" under the protection of a Catholic European power. Yet the foundations of both "national" models were the same : " The mountains and villages of Lebanon, and church bells ringing

freely, European ships protecting them and European hands helping them to reform, a new reign of peace and progress with their Muslim neighbors" (Hourani, 1970: 275-276).

The idea of Lebanon had been subscribed to by Maronites and Catholics, although some of them considered the idea of "Syria" as pathway to achieve the aforesaid goal. Hence, it is noted that the Maronite writer Bulus Nujaym, who wrote his book "The Lebanese Question" in French, under the pen-name M. Jouplain. He expressed his adherence for the independence of "Syria", maintaining at the same time Lebanon should have a special position within this entity with the aid of France (Hourani, 1970: 275).

On the other hand, the people who adhered to concept of "Syria," were mainly educated in the American missionary schools. They considered the idea of Lebanon to encompass Maronite domination and French cultural hegemony. Thus, it was not surprisingly that the first people who subscribed to this "Syrian nationalism" were Greek orthodox and Protestant Christians, later to be followed by some Druzes and Muslims (Hourani, 1970: 276). However this "Syrian" identity was extremely confused with its Arab counterpart, and did not separate the "Syrians" from the Arabs, thus this movement was not capable of establishing a separate "Syrian nationalism" (Salibi, 2003: 46).

#### **Lammens: Greater "Syria" in Historical Context**

The intersection between both "national" abovementioned trends took place at the hands of the Belgian Jesuit Priest Henri Lammens<sup>19</sup>. The latter wrote his famous book *La Syrie: Percis Historique* (Syria: A Short History) after the French triumph over Faisal's Arab kingdom and the establishment of "Greater Lebanon" in 1920. It was clear that he had a political purpose, rather than an objective one, especially if it is realized that,

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<sup>19</sup> Lammens is of uttermost importance in our research, hence, in due course, I shall illustrate his immense impact on both: Syrian and Lebanese Phoenician nationalisms



according to Kamal Salibi, this work is intentioned towards finding a “Syrian” nationalism to stand against it’s the aspirations of the Arab nationalists. The latter were mainly comprised of Arab Muslim inhabitants of Syria and Lebanon, who were later assisted by both the Americans and the British. Hence his book can be viewed as an attempt to resist both internal an external rivals of the French Mandate (Salibi, 2003: 130-131).

Lammens stated in the preface that this work was written upon the request of the French high commissioner, General Henri Gouraud. He clearly wrote:

“After his victory in Mayslaoun,<sup>20</sup> General Goraud entrusted me in preparing lectures regarding 1) The History of Syria, 2) the Arabian peninsula 3) Islam and its development 4) the French expansion in the east.” He also added “I had to confine this research within the situation in Syria after the Arab conquest...and I dedicated myself to search for the features of the Syrian identity prior to that era.” Hence, Lammens said that he was mainly concerned with two historical periods which he considered “The most influential in Syria’s history which are the Umayyad period and the Crusades.” Lammens asserted that in the second volume he “made the best effort to illuminate Greater Lebanon’s origins and past however the other subjects [regarding Syria’s past] were summarized.”<sup>21</sup>

Accordingly it can be said that “Greater Lebanon” is a simplified version of “Greater Syria,” where the sectarian and territorial balances were behind the differentiation between both entities. This is evident in the fact that the idea “Syria” represented the eastern Churches and Christians (e.g. Greek Orthodox, Syriac Christians, Greek

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<sup>20</sup> The battle through which King Faisal’s Arab kingdom was overtaken by the French forces in 1920, and marked the end of the two year Arab independence in Damascus.

<sup>21</sup> H. Lammens, *La Syrie: Percis Historique* (Syria: a Short History), (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1921), Volume 1, pp. I-II, I Shall illustrate Lammens’s influence on Saadeh in due course.

Catholics), while "Lebanon" was more appealing to the European oriented Christians, especially the ones that adhered to France, particularly the Maronites.

### **Saadeh and the Emergence of "Pure" Syrian Nationalism:**

The concept of "Syria" did not take its distinguishing feature and was vigorously politically active, until Saadeh and his Syrian Social Nationalist Party emerged. It clashed with both the Arab nationalists and the subscribers of "Phoenician" Lebanon. This fact led Saadeh, using Hegel's dialectic logic, to believe that his ideology was the Synthesis between both ideas (Saadeh, n.d.: 23-24). With little doubt, one is compelled to inquire about the location of this "Syrian Nation" which Saadeh dynamically promoted.

Contrary to what Saadeh and his party claimed, the former had two answers. In the first definition of the location of "Syria" Saadeh maintained that it had "natural boundaries stretching from the Taurus mountain range in the north and reaches the Suez Canal in the South, including the Sinai Peninsula and the Gulf of Aqaba, and from the Syrian [Mediterranean] Sea in the west to the desert in the east reaching the Tigris river."<sup>22</sup>

Also other researches and contemporaries of Saadeh illustrated this change in his territorial definition of "Syria", such as Patrick Seale (Seale, 1966: 4) and a former party member and one of the few who had studied the party, Labib Zuwiyya Yamak.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, one of the most vigorous Arab nationalist rivals of the party, Sati AlHusri, had attached a photocopied picture of the front page of the party's newspaper in Sao Paulo, "*Surryah Al jadeedah*," in 1939. It bears a depiction of a map of Saadeh's "Syria" which

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<sup>22</sup> Antoun Saadeh, *The principles of Syrian National Party*, 1937, the fifth Principle quoted by Sati Alhusri, *Defa'an 'an Al'Urobah* (in defense of Arabism), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Beirut: Dar Al 'ilm lilmalayeen, 1957), pp.48-49

<sup>23</sup> Labib Zuwiyya Yamak, *The Syrian Social nationalist Party: An Ideological Analysis*, p.84, although he made the mistake of assuming that the eastern frontier of Saadeh's Syria, was the Euphrates

did not include the whole of Iraq and Cyprus that were later added as parts of the party's nation (Alhusri, 1957: 47).

Also, AlHusri noted nine important positions where in Saadeh's national Gospel, *Nosho' Al'ummum* (The Genesis of Nations), which was first published in Beirut in 1938, revealed that Saadeh did not include the whole of Iraq, including Baghdad, nor Cyprus or Kuwait to be part of "Syria" (AlHusri, 1985: 91-92). The most revealing was when Saadeh said "The Persians had resorted to Shi'ism so they would create a division [in the Islamic Empire] and rid themselves from Umayyad Syria's control and to retrieve their spiritual and physical independence. Iraq followed Persia, to regain its control [over its affairs] while Syria maintained Sunni Islam in order to avoid falling under the control of the Persians" (Saadeh, 1938: 175). Clearly, according the aforesaid excerpt, Iraq and "Syria" were two different entities.

On the other hand upon examining the second edition of the same work, published in 1951 in Damascus, the same sentence was written as follows: "The Persians had resorted to Shi'ism so they would create a division [in the Islamic Empire] and rid themselves from Umayyad Syria's control and to retrieve their spiritual and physical independence and to regain their control [over their affairs] while Syria maintained Sunni Islam in order avoid falling under the control of the Persians," (Saadeh, 1951: 175) without any reference to Iraq.

Moreover, Saadeh admitted, in one of his speeches, that "in the beginning the party did not stress on including the whole of Iraq, in its national cause, thus making the boundaries of the Syrian homeland reaching only the Tigris river," explaining that Iraq at that time had a "separatist tendency." He emphasized that the party's belief of the

existence "of the unity of life and existence which was becoming firmer and stronger" was the reason for encompassing the whole Iraqi territory (Saadeh, 1993: 165). At a later stage Saadeh had denied conducting such a change in the boundaries of the "Syrian homeland" (Saadeh, 1998: 165).

After his return from South America in 1947, Saadeh had a new definition of the "Syrian homeland" where he said: "It [Syria] extends from the Taurus range in the northwest, and the Zagros mountains in the northeast to the Suez Canal and the Red Sea in the South and includes the Sinai Peninsula and the Gulf of Aqaba, and from the Syrian [Mediterranean] Sea in the west, including the Island of Cyprus, to the arch of the Arabian Dessert and the Persian Gulf in the east" (Saadeh, n.d.: 27).

Sati AlHusri noticed that the new definition suffers from some serious flaws. He stated that "according to the new definition the Zagros Mountains lie to the northeast from the 'Syrian homeland' ...However the eastern part of this homeland stretches until these mountains, instead it is bound by the arch of the Arabian dessert and the Persian Gulf. Accordingly, it only includes the northern part of Iraq, excluding its middle and southern ones, since these parts, as it is widely known, are to the east of the Arabian Dessert's arch." Hence AlHusri, clarified that sketching the "Syrian homeland" according to the aforesaid definition, is similar to the French territory in Sykes-Picot agreement (Alhusri, 1957: 50). Thus, Saadeh's definition of the "Syrian Nation," is tentative.

Saadeh's evident change in the "Syrian homeland," is not the product of further scientific research or innocent, as he claimed (Saadeh, n.d.: 30-31). The former Syrian Nationalist party member and the Palestinian historian, Anis Sayigh, clarified that upon Saadeh's return from South America in 1947 he allied himself with the Hashemites, who

controlled both Iraq and Jordan, with the assistance of the British government. The latter seemed concerned of the rise of Arab national political sentiments after the establishment of the Arab League, thus supporting the Hashemites and their project to unify Iraq, Syria, Jordan, with Palestine, while providing the Christians of Lebanon and the Jews of Palestine an autonomous rule. Accordingly, as Sayigh maintained, Saadeh received financial support from the both King Abdullah of Jordan, and the British Government. Therefore, Saadeh, according to Sayigh, aspired to become the prime minister of king Abdullah's "Greater Syria," and the latter would act as its king (Sayigh, 1966: 321-322).

#### **Syrian Nationalism: A new Form of Official Nationalism**

Saadeh's fluid definition of "Syria" has its serious connotation. It leads to consider that his nationalist discourse belongs to what Benedict Anderson described as "official nationalism." In this case national boundaries and identities are intentionally constructed by dominant groups, who sought to avoid being marginalized by the rise of popular nationalism. This process was not the product of a "natural" historical process as it was the case in other regions such as the Americas (Anderson, 1999: chapter 6).

Categorizing Saadeh's ideology as a form of what Anderson described as "official nationalism" raises some problems, since Saadeh was not a head of state nor did he belong to a ruling dynasty. This is, however, the novelty in Saadeh's case. His party has been described as a "state within a state." Also according to a close observer of the party "there is hardly a function that is normally performed by government which is not duplicated or at least imitated by the party" (Yamak, 1969: 124). This is evident in the fact that the party has a legislative body called the "Higher Council" and an executive branch named the "Council of Commissioners." The latter is composed of the heads of

several departments such the department of defense, interior, finance, external affairs, culture and fine arts and so forth (Yamak, 1969:128). Accordingly, Saadeh's party is a micro-manifestation of the "Syrian state" which it aspires to establish. This makes its national doctrine, if the party is to seize power in Lebanon or elsewhere in the Fertile Crescent, imposed from above. It is an ideology adopted by the state and introduced to the people.

Saadeh's discourse regarding "Syria's" history<sup>24</sup> provides a tangible example on how his version of the "Syrian" state would be implemented. Saadeh's historical scenario which merely concentrates on the pre-Islamic history of the Fertile Crescent would be the base on which the "Syrians" would view their past and identity. By excluding Arabs and Islam and focusing on the remote past of the region and the advocacy of the party's doctrines, the inhabitants of the Arab Middle East would become "Syrianized." This includes that the people within the region would have to be molded in their behavior, identity and lifestyle in the same manner as Saadeh's partisans.

The abovementioned process is unique in the sense that inhabitants of the Fertile Crescent who would have to change their vision of the past and the future. This is evident due to the fact that "Syrianizing" the people in the region includes the following:

- 1- The loyalty to a specified territory ("Syria") regardless of any affiliation towards language or religion, i.e. abandoning any other identity which might seem attractive to them. In this case the Arab identity.

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<sup>24</sup> See above p.79 and forward.

2- The submission to the authority of the party and its leader, Saadeh. This is clarified in the oath which the partisans in the Syrian Nationalist Party took.<sup>25</sup>

3- The firm belief in the ideals that are constructed by Saadeh and the party.

Therefore, it is noted that Saadeh defined "Syria" in accordance with his political agendas, making his movement a unique project that attempted to formulate a national consciousness among the inhabitants of the "Fertile Crescent." However, Saadeh's ideological venture did not succeed, since his political schemes had failed. This prevented his variation of identity from being practically implemented. As a result, this made his variation of "formal nationalism" only a potential which was never fulfilled. In fact, he was never able to seize power in any of the countries of the Arab Middle East. Accordingly, "Syrian" nationalism is best understood as an attempt to imitate the western model of nationalism, yet at the political level it was a definite failure.

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<sup>25</sup> Yamak rightly clarified that the oath which the Syrian nationalists took "leaves no doubt that the individual, upon joining the party, agrees to abandon all his rights and to submit instead to the will of the party and the leader [Saadeh]." Note : Labib Zuwiyya Yamak, *The Syrian Social nationalist Party: An Ideological Analysis*, p.112

## Chapter 4

### Saadeh's National Theory: an Analysis of its Narrative and its

#### Epistemology:

##### Saadeh's "Blood and Soil" Doctrine:

It is noted that Saadeh's nationalist view was defined in terms of "Biology and Geography: People and territory" as Yamak rightly mentioned (Yamak, 1969: 76). This leads to question what those terms mean in the former's dictionary.

In terms of biology (or "blood"), Saadeh was clear in the ten lectures which he gave at the American University of Beirut in 1948 to clarify his national visions one year prior to his death. He "accepted the historical and scientific fact that humanity is divided between superior racial fusions and inferior ones" (Saadeh, 1998: 70). Although in his book *Noshou' Al'Umumm* he had pointed that "It should not be concluded that from the psychological or mental traits that there are mental racial talents which are gained from the racial appearance and are only limited to one race, since reality proved otherwise." He elaborated that Sparta in ancient Greece prohibited racial mixture with other peoples, though Sparta was less civilized than Athens that was not keen on such racial "purity." (Saadeh, 1994: 51). This may seem as a contradiction in Saadeh's vision, yet this is not the case. In his work, he argued that some primitive races have more readiness for civilization, while others lack this tendency. He claimed that the North Americans ("Red Indians") had convenient natural circumstances, such as land fertility and an adequate climate for establishing a great civilization but, in his opinion, they were unable to reach this end (Saadeh, 1994: 50).



Such ambiguity can be clarified by the fact that Saadeh rejected the idea of superior race to be confined within one lineage or ethnicity, such as the Aryans. In fact, he accepted such a differentiation between peoples of different racial fusions. In other words, since he rejected the concept of the purity of the race, he considered that certain racial fusions are superior to others. This was clarified when he said "We cannot properly understand the psychology of individuals and human groups unless we comprehend their physiology and racial hereditary composition, since there is a firm relationship between one's psychology and physiology" (Saadeh, 1998: 79-80). Once more Saadeh uses the Native Americans as the primary example for his case to prove exclusively the superiority of a few racial fusions. He said "There is an extremely strong relationship between the individual's psychology and his physiology; I gave an example about the backwardness of the American Indians that were unable to formulate a material culture, an elevated spirituality or psyche. There is little doubt that one of the reasons for the failure in establishing a refined culture or spirituality is something emerging from the nature of the people, of the nature of their composition, their psychological potentials which provide their psychological capability and potentials." He added that "there is a strong relationship between the physical formation and the spirit, between the human being's Physiological appearance and his mental capability. Hence, after looking at a person's face or head we immediately realize what his appearance reveals regarding his psychological ability and strength, his intense intelligence, spiritual activism and mental strength, or his mental weakness and the feebleness of his awareness which hinders him from acquiring a strong mental capability or having superior cultural and personal qualifications"(Saadeh, 1998: 80).

Saadeh attempted to apply his scientific theory on the "Syrian People," when he claimed that the "Syrians" superiority is a result of their physiological composition. This is evident when Saadeh said that "If we look at the shape of the Syrian human's brain we note that it is shaped in the manner necessary to have a strong brain, which is complete in its capabilities, in its characteristics: It has a high advanced forehead which provides the center of thinking and awareness [in the brain] the freedom and the growth of its capabilities. We also note the height of the top of his head and the protrusion of the cranium, where both enable the senses and the nervous centers to reach their natural strength" (Saadeh, 1998: 80).

Accordingly, Saadeh reached his final conclusion "Thus we are fully aware that when we consider racial fusion, and reject the existence of a sole racial origin of the nation, we definitely do not mean that we should disregard the importance of race and characteristics of the racial coherent fusion and overlook the solid scientific facts that provide us with a new basis when observing the origins of nations and the conditions of human groups in general" (Saadeh, 1998: 80-81). He also reiterated this conclusion by saying "we accept the scientific and historical fact that humanity is divided among superior racial fusions and inferior ones" (Saadeh, 1998: 70).

The racial factor in Saadeh's nationalist ideology was always the most prominent. He said that "It is possible to change the psychology of the nation if we are able to physically change it." He affirmed that by claiming that the difference between the "Egyptian" and the "Syrian" cannot be perceived unless "the Syrian racial fusion and the Egyptian racial fusion are examined" (Saadeh, 1998: 70).

Saadeh's emphasis on the superiority racial fusion was of vital importance for his national theory. Otherwise, he would not be able to explain the affect of geography on the formation of nations , as it will be elaborated in this study. Hence, it was necessary for him to adopt some of these assumptions in order to explain why some "races" in his opinion, such as the Africans and the Native Americans were unable to construct "great civilizations" similar to those established in Europe and "Greater Syria."

Saadeh's idea of race stems from an old tradition of racism. The French sociologist, Armand Cuvillier, illustrated that European and non European scientists and writers had adopted ideas, similar to Saadeh, regarding racial differences. They considered them as the result of natural evolutions of the human species that are manifested in people's physical shape along with the size and formations of their skulls. Cuvillier clarified that such ideas became "mystical doctrines" among some Europeans. The latter found them a convenient way to explain the traits of different ethnicities and their mental capabilities. Hence, they explained all of the cultural differences among races and the backward tendencies of some of them according to the idea of race and its physical formation (Cuvillier, 1960: 193-194).

According to Cuvillier, such ideologies were a convenient approach to explain everything in different societies from the distribution of cities reaching social classes. Such social elements were interpreted by the "capabilities of the superior race or the deficiencies of the inferior" (Cuvillier, 1960: 194). These ideas clearly intersect with Saadeh's assertion of the existence of superior racial fusions and inferior counterparts that explain the reasons for the different capabilities in establishing "higher" or "lower" cultures.

Cuvillier provided clear examples on this issue, as he illustrated that some writers interpreted The French revolution (1789) as the rebellion of the Alpians (from the Alps) individuals with short skulls against the northern race with the rectangular shaped craniums. Another example he provided is that some thinkers thought that the physical composition of mine workers is the reason for their "inferiority" (Cuvillier, 1960: 195). This is a direct reminder of Saadeh's discussions about the differences between various racial fusions' skull shapes that forms the difference in their abilities.

Cuvillier noted "It is clear that the reasons for the permanence of the existence of this sociological trend cannot be explained by its scientific value...but rather its intentional nature," as he revealed such ideas provided a justification for European powers to colonize other countries and territories or the enslavement of other human beings, such as Aristotle's claim that "nature prepared" slaves to acquire such an inferior position, or how some Spanish priests and historians used such allegations for the Spanish expansion and the colonization of the Americas (Cuvillier, 1960: 195). Clearly this is exactly the way through which Saadeh viewed the Native Americans.

From a scientific perspective, more recent research proved that the differences in individuals' skull size, height or skin color are only superficial ones, and that their mental capabilities are equal (Mo'ness, 1998: 20-21). Not surprisingly, even some Arab historians, such as Ibn Khaldun adopted such ideas when he considered that some races are able to be civilized while others were closer to being animals (Mo'ness, 1998: 45).

Cuvillier quoted the famous French sociologist Emile Durkheim. The latter said that similar social structures were found across the world, within groups of different racial origins (Cuvillier, 1960: 197-198). Cuvillier also highlighted the fact that the racial

composition of every nation is the result of its common life; hence it is the outcome of social interaction and behavior rather than being the reason for it (Cuvillier, 1960: 200).

Furthermore, Saadeh's utilization of certain researchers' ideas about the "Syrian" physical appearance and shape, such as the ones provided by A. Kappers, (Saadeh, 1994: 44) lacked scientific basis. Cuvillier had asserted that after revising such studies, one notices that the concept of race is very vague. Also, the division of races and their traits differ from one scientist to another, which severely undermines the credibility of such ideas.<sup>26</sup>

#### **Saadeh and Geographical Determinism:**

Although Saadeh had used terms in *Noshou' Al'ummum* such as "History is not written on the nature of earth" (Saadeh, 1994:66) yet he said in the same book the "Physical environment or the land... is the most important factor in shaping a [social] group's character" (Saadeh, 1994:64). He also indicated that a nation's physical environment (land) is only a "potential." On the other hand, he considered in other parts of his writings as the decisive element in shaping the society and the nation. He said that a nation is bound by natural frontiers and claimed that the "specified [physical] environment is the melting pot for the lives of different groups and fuses them in a manner which provides them with their specific characteristics." Saadeh added that the land is the "environment which is the center for gathering and agglomeration, it is more important than the natural frontiers to form the social environment, however the natural barriers are also important to protect the [social] group" (Saadeh, 1994: 199-201).

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<sup>26</sup> For further details and examples of this issue note: Armand Cuvillier, *Madkhal il 'ilm Al Ijtima'* (An Introduction to Sociology), pp. 199-201

In order to reassert this point, Saadeh wrote that although humans adjust the land, but the "land specifies the extent of this adjustment and its forms depending on its natural environments" (Saadeh, 1994: 59). Hence Saadeh defined the nation as "A group of humans that live with unified interests, share the same destiny and have unified psycho-physical elements, in a specified homeland, which provides them through their interaction with it, their characteristics and traits that distinguish them from other groups" (Saadeh, 1994: 259).

Therefore the abovementioned definition clarifies how geography (i.e. "land" or "soil"), plays a definite part in Saadeh's theory of nationalism. Accordingly, he adopted a form of what is known as "Geographic determinism." Hence, Saadeh considered that a nation is a mixture between the land and its people, where a "Superior" racial fusion of humans occupies a land that determines their characteristics. However, certain problems arise in Saadeh's definition. He did not provide an answer regarding the origins of the racial fusion since certainly the land does not provide it. It was the case with "inferior" races such as the Native Americans who had the proper land, yet they were not "civilized" as he claimed. Thus, his nationalistic idea and the two elements he specified, blood and soil, to define the nation are ambiguous. This is evident since Saadeh did not clarify the reasons for the existence of different racial fusions. In other words: What are the elements that form a superior racial fusion? Is it the land that affects its evolution? Is it by mere coincidence? Saadeh was completely vague regarding these issues.

#### **The Idea of Geography and its Discontents:**

Saadeh depends heavily on geography in the abovementioned quotations, it should be also noted that his theory is also an old sociological theory. Armand Cuvillier clarified

such a theory is extremely similar to the aforesaid racial theory, where it has the determinism regarding human behavior, as race determines man's capabilities so does the land in this line of thinking. These assertions, according to Cuvillier, are abstract and reject the notion of human freedom and capabilities, as if the land determines human destiny once and for all. This indicates that both sociological schools have the same biased and intentional purposes most of the time (Cuvillier, 1960: 209). He added that "both schools have the same naïve assertions and the same course." Cuvillier illustrated this point by revealing how the German Geographer, Friedrich Ratzel, used this theory to justify the need for a nation to have its *Lebensraum* (living space), where it needs to extend itself beyond its old "boundaries" (i.e. to colonize other territories) (Cuvillier, 1960: 210). Such ideas directly correlate with the ones adopted by Saadeh, as he clearly says that a "nation should not suffocate itself within the boundaries of its original environment" (Saadeh, 1998: 78). Saadeh even provides a tangible historical evidence for the need of such "living space." He used the Phoenician expansion over North Africa (e.g. Carthage) as his primary example (Saadeh, 1998: 71).

The idea of geographic determinism can be traced, according to the Egyptian historian, Hussein Mo'ness, to the ancient Greeks. One notes that the ancient Philosopher and biologist Hippocrates had written his work entitled "On Airs, Waters and places" in which he claimed that humans have different physical shapes according to their geographic locations (Mo'ness, 1998: 32).

Even the Arab historian Ibn Khaldoun claimed that the greatness of the Islamic religion, despite its harsh environment, is due to humidity which generates "some moderation in people's behaviors" (Moussa, 1959: 244). Yet, Mo'ness, uses Arnold

Toynbee's conclusions regarding this issue. The latter noted that some claimed that civilizations are established if human groups live next to rivers as it was the case in Mesopotamia and Egypt. He illustrated that in the Neograndi and the Colorado Rivers, similar environmental conditions existed. However, no civilizations were established (Mo'ness, 1998: 41). He reiterated his vision by illustrating that the Indies civilization was established over a high plateau, while in the forests of the Amazon River below it, no civilization was established (Mo'ness, 1998: 42).

According to some accounts, as Toynbee said, the Chinese civilization was established on the "Yellow" river, yet the Danube River had a similar environment, and it did not witness a "similar civilization" near it. Toynbee highlighted that these are just some examples that prove the feebleness of the "geographic determinism" theory (Mo'ness, 1998: 42-43).

Finally, in evaluating Saadeh's national theory, which as previously elaborated was based on geography and biology, blood and soil, one is unable to escape the conclusion that his ideas, were based on two old biased sociological theories, which were surpassed later on by more research. Thus, Saadeh's definition of a nation lacked any concrete evidence.

It could be claimed that this was the "Spirit of the times," and Saadeh was simply following the fashionable scientific trends at his era. In retrospect nothing could have been further from the truth. A close glance at the racial superiority theory, which was adopted with certain variations, by Fascists and Nazis, it is noticed that despite the defeat of both regimes and the weakness of their ideas after the Second World War, Saadeh remained adhered to this ideology even after its apparent retreat. This was lucid, when he



changed his doctrines, and encompassed new territories in the “Syrian nation,” yet he still adhered to the ideology of racial superiority, especially when he elaborated the principles of the party in 1948, three years after the war, in what was called the “Ten Lectures.”

With reference to the theory of geographic determinism, such ideas were also adopted by Hitler, and became weaker after the defeat. Also Lucien Febvre, a protégée of one of Saadeh’s authorities on geography the French Paul Vidal De la Blach,<sup>27</sup> co-authored a book in the 1920(s) which was translated into English entitled, “A Geographical Introduction to History.” Febvre noted in the aforesaid work that he rejects the idea of Geographic determinism. Instead he claimed that geography only offers a potential for the human ability to survive and establish civilizations (Febvre, 1925).

#### **Saadeh and the Colonial “Map”:**

It is vital to note that Saadeh through above specifications of “Syria” was following what Benedict Anderson considered to be in the colonial “nations,” as the “Map.” This was evident when Saadeh adhered to what French Orientalists considered to be “Greater Syria,” apparently following the footsteps of the French Mandate’s ideologue Henri Lammens. Saadeh was imitating in his first definition of the Syrian nation what the French considered and “imagined” to be the “natural” boundaries of “Syria” (Salibi, 2003: 134-135).

This case is not novel. According to Anderson’s work some post colonial nationalists found, regardless of the ethnic and social accuracy of their assertions, their “national” communities within the boundaries that were set forth by the colonialist states. This took

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<sup>27</sup> Note how Saadeh almost entirely depended on De la Blach when he studied the relationship between the natural environment and the social human groups; see Antoun Saadeh, *Noshou’ Al’Umumm* (The Genesis of Nations), pp.60- 63

place while they themselves were opposing these very same powers (Anderson, 1999: 70).

Even in Saadeh's second definition of "Syria," he did not surpass other Orientalist views, namely the Egyptologist James Henry Breasted, who had coined the term the "Fertile Crescent."<sup>28</sup> This entity included both Iraq and *Assham* regions, which is contrary to Saadeh's claim that it was an expression attributed to the Arabs "as a result of their superficial accurate observation" (Saadeh, n.d.: 28). Hence, in both cases Saadeh was following what he "imagined" to be "Syria" which was mainly derived from the maps and geographical observations of established colonial and Orientalist writers and thinkers.

As in the case of the second foundation of "Saadeh's Syria," which is the privileged racial fusion, it seems that such a theory was not successful in the inauguration of "national consciousness" in Europe. However, according to Anderson, nationalism meant in the European and colonial states' experience: eternity, high ideals and love beyond materialistic interests. It also concentrated on language, rather than "blood," which had spread through the printed press vernacular languages, as it was previously mentioned. The racist tendencies which occurred during the European colonial age were associated with class and aristocratic myths about having "blue blood." Thus, it was implemented in the colonized areas as bourgeois and petty bourgeois colonial functionaries acted as superior people ("whites") towards the subjugated people in the occupied areas (Anderson, 1999: chapter 8).

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<sup>28</sup> "Fertile Crescent." The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition. 2008. Encyclopedia.com. 14 Mar. 2010 <<http://www.encyclopedia.com>>.

An apt explanation for Saadeh's concentration on "racial fusion," is the fact and particularly in the case of Lebanon, that many people trace their ancestry to different ethnic groups, whether Arab, Phoenician, Crusaders<sup>29</sup> etc. Hence he considered "the land" as the common denominator, between all of these "peoples." This led him to subscribe to the idea of a "racial fusion," along with the geography as a determining frame. In fact, Saadeh considered that adherence to the "Syrian Nation" would erode such attachments to ethnic ancestries.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> As in the case of the rival clan in his village al Shweir, the Sawayas who claimed that they were the descendents of the Crusaders; see above p.39

<sup>30</sup> Antoun Saadeh, *Mabade' AlHizb Alsuri Al Qawmi Alijtima'i* (The Principles of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party), pp. 23-24

## **Chapter 5**

### **Implementing Saadeh's "Syria":**

#### **Rewriting History:**

As Benedict Anderson had asserted that in order for a new "imagined community," i.e. nation to emerge, the advocates of this idea needed to indulge in a process of rewriting history. This is done beyond such old narrative which concentrated on either ruling dynasties or religion. Thus the "nationalists" attempt to provide an account regarding the "nation's" past as community and a unified body regardless of both religion and ruling dynasties (Anderson, 1999: 12).

In the case of Saadeh, however, there was a third element which affected his historical narrative regarding "Syria" besides the two abovementioned ones. He was indulged in an intellectual battle with the Arab Nationalists. This was evident as the latter were strong opponents of the Syrian Socialist Nationalist party. Such rivalry took an acute form since Arab nationalism was gaining huge momentum during the interwar period (i.e. 1920(s)-1940(s)). Hence, Saadeh had to find a way to distinguish the "Syrians" from the Arabs.

It is extremely revealing that Saadeh dismissed in his party's fourth principle of the existence of the Arabs as a component of the peoples that formed the "Syrian Nation." He focused on other ancient groups, namely the "Canaanites, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Aramaeans, Amorites, Hittites, and Metanni" (Saadeh, n.d.: 21). This Led Yamak to note, that excluding Arabs, who gave the majority of "Syrians" their Arabic language and Islam, assumes that "fourteen centuries in the history of the nation are but a fleeting moment and are therefore, of no consequence whatsoever." Thus, this leads to the

inevitable conclusion that “Saadeh, the social scientists bows in submission to Saadeh, the Syrian nationalist” (Yamak, 1969: 84).

It is apparent that Arab nationalism was a successful and a dominant ideology in the Arab Middle East during the post World War I period, i.e. the same period Saadeh established his party. In this context such an ideology with its dominant zeal challenged Saadeh’s thoughts to a great extent his leadership .Thus, he indulged in an extremely heated debate with the followers of Arabism. Saadeh illustrated an extremely high level of animosity towards Arab nationalism.<sup>31</sup> This was clearly manifested in his distribution of all sorts of unflattering traits over the Arab nationalists. Therefore, he labeled the Arab nationalists to have “forged nationalism and displayed it in the markets for sale” (Saadeh, 1997: 244). Moreover, Saadeh claimed that Arabists “suffer from the psychological disease of Arabism”(Saadeh, 1979: 113). Furthermore, Saadeh reduced Arab nationalism into a “religious propaganda” (Saadeh, 1994: 264).

In Saadeh’s ideology Arabs are primitive and “savage” peoples. He evidently reduced them into Bedouins (Saadeh, 1994: 85-91). The implication of such a categorization is intriguing since it has its bearing on Saadeh’s view of the Islamic conquests of “Syria.” He rejected the Arabs from being a component of the racial fusion of “Syria” as if the aforementioned historical incident was a trivial one if not a historical mistake.

Saadeh clearly illustrated his deep remorse over the success of the Islamic conquest. He claimed that “Just as Syria was retrieving its identity and traits during the Roman Empire’s era, it witnessed the Arab conquest which required changing its language, then

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<sup>31</sup> One reason could be as suggested by some researchers that according to some studies he was of a non Arab origin; note Laurent and Annie Charby, *siysah wa aqlyat fi AlShareq Al Adna* (Politics and Minorities in the Near East) trans. Dr. thouqan qarqoot, (Cairo: madbouli, 1991), p.213

the Mongol Conquest occurred which has ruined the land and tumbled down Damascus and then the suppressive Turkish rule followed” (Saadeh, 2004: 18). The implications of such an allegation cannot be underestimated by any means. The historical connotation made on his behalf regarding “Syria’s” golden age in the Byzantine era in the Near East suffers from some serious handicaps. Not but Philip Hitti, clarified that at this era the Greek Byzantine aristocracy has subjugated the Semitic peoples of the Near east and overburdened them with taxes (including the pre Islamic Near eastern Arabs who Saadeh totally ignores). This led to an age of turmoil, uprisings and unrest in the whole of the Near East. Hitti went further to claim that the aforementioned peoples expressed their anti roman affiliations and their need for the preservation of their “national” character by embracing a different confessional Christianity, i.e. Monophysism in *Assham* or Nestorism, as in the case of Mesopotamia, who although they were against Byzantium, yet their concept of the nature of Christ immensely differed (Hitti: 2002a, vol.1: 369-372). If it is kept in mind that Saadeh is the son of the eastern Byzantine Greek Orthodox Church then his abovementioned historical fallacy comes into perspective. It is a manifestation of a sect that is afraid of a small Lebanon with its Maronite flavor and a greater “Islamic” Arab nation (Salibi, 2003: 54-55).

Saadeh clearly claimed that the Islamic conquest was the major cause of the crusades (Saadeh, 1997: 91).<sup>32</sup> This historical event strengthened the western church affiliates such

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<sup>32</sup> Antoun Saadeh, *Al Islam fi resalatieh: Almasehyyah wa Almohamdyyah* (Islam in it's two Messages: Christianity and Mohammedanism), p.91; Note also: Saadeh, *Antoun Saadeh Fi Al 'wal Min Athar* (Antoun Saadeh on the First of March), p.18

as the Maronite church i.e. the historical rivals of the Greek Orthodox believers till the 19<sup>th</sup> century, if not the 20<sup>th</sup>.<sup>33</sup>

In *Noshou' Al'Umumm*, Saadeh based his view of the Arabs on Ibn Khaldun's "*Muqadimah*," who made several claims concerning the Arabs. The latter viewed them to be rigid, "savage" and are only ruled via a religious zeal. According to Mohammad Jameel Bayhem's, a 20<sup>th</sup> century Lebanese historian, Saadeh used the *Muqadimah* during an ideological conversation among both, as historical evidence to support the notion that Arab civilization was both trivial and not worthy to be affiliated with (Bayhum , 1957: 47).

Bayhum carefully pointed out that Ibn Khaldun lived throughout a disturbed era in North Africa, as several ruling dynasties from "Berber" origins were in the midst of a severe competition with their Arab competitors. According to Bayhum, in that troubled age Ibn Khaldun, a descendant of an Arab Yemeni tribe, offered his services to his new Berber masters, and in order to please them he undermined Arabs. Thus, Ibn Khaldun associated always Arabs with bedouins and overlooked their sedentary compatriots (Bayhum , 1957: 59-70).

However, Ibn Khaldun did praise the Arabs in several parts of his *Muqadimah*. This is evident when he mentioned the greatness of the pre-Islamic Yemeni states, as Bayhum illuminated and clarified (Bayhum , 1957: 52). Saadeh overlooked these parts in the *Muqadimah*, since there are no reference whatsoever in his writings.

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<sup>33</sup> For a vivid account on the animosity between the Maronites and their Greek Orthodox compatriots in Saadeh's village, *AlShweir*, note: Salim mujais, *Antoun saadeh: A Biography, volume 1: The Youth Years*, (Beirut: Kutub publications, 2004), p.28

Thus, Saadeh considered Arabs as savage occupiers and a foreign rule over "Syria." Furthermore, he claimed that the Arabs derived their names from "*al'arabah*," a name of the dessert (Saadeh, 1998: 61). This "*al'arabah*," according to Saadeh, "has no civilization or urbanization" and he concludes that "Arabs did not surpass the state of primitivism and lacked any scientific knowledge"(Saadeh, 1998: 22).

The name "*al'arabah*," in which Saadeh reduced the entire Arabian Peninsula to, with all of its diversities, stems from the old Arab tradition. In the old tradition this name did not refer to the whole of the Arabian Peninsula but to an area in which the old Arab historians and story tellers believed to have been the place where Ishmael the son of Abraham had lived (AlAbrashy, 1984: 85). However, the claim that Arabs derived their name from the aforesaid area had been rejected by several old Arab historians. These historians claimed that places are named after their settlers and not vice versa. Also Arabs are divided amongst many tribes so how can they be reduced into a small area where Ishmael had lived? (Abduh, 1999: 329).

Furthermore, according to the old Arab tradition the northern Arabs (the ones who believe themselves to be the descendents of Ishmael) are known to be the "non authentic" Arabs (*must'aribah* i.e. Arabized Arabs) while the southern ones are known to be the authentic ones (*al'arebah* i.e. pure Arabs). Hence, how can the original pure clan (i.e. the southern Arabians) become named after the non original one? Thus it is noted that Saadeh's claim concerning the Arabs' name is tentative. Especially that he reduced Arabs into nomads and totally ignored the sedentary Arabs who formed the majority of the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula at the dawn of Islam (Hourani, 1992: 10).



The pre-Islamic Arab civilization was discussed in the first chapter. However it is worth noting that the existence of an advanced civilization in pre-Islamic Arabia had been asserted by several sources, including those ones that were written during Saadeh's time (Hitti, 1937 and O'Leary, 1927). The mere existence of Arabia Felix with its water dams and advanced irrigation systems, let alone the southern Arabians' skill in building both architecture and statues<sup>34</sup>, sheds some serious doubts about the epistemological value of Saadeh's claims.

Saadeh's dismay with Arabs does not find its limitations at the anthropological claims he made about Arabia. He claimed that the spiritual level of the Arabs was of a primitive nature if not a ludicrous one. He attempted to use the Koran as a solid proof of their backwardness. Saadeh referred to the Koranic verses such as Verse no. 97 of *Surat Altawbah* (The 9<sup>th</sup> *Surat* of the Koran) which indicates that the bedouins' faith is hypocritical. He claimed that Arabians remain to be irreligious till the present times (Saadeh, 1997: 51).

Saadeh used a comment attributed to Ali Ibn Abi Taleb<sup>35</sup>, in which he accused the members of the historically well known Christian tribe of *Taghleb* as "not having any association with Christianity, and the only thing they derived from it was drinking alcohol"(Saadeh, 1998: 184). Saadeh capitalized on this remark, and claimed that "Most of them [Arabs] did not comprehend anything from Christianity except for alcohol drinking and [nothing] from Mohammedanism except for plunders" (Saadeh, 1997: 188).

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<sup>34</sup> Adnan Tarssisi, *Ard Saba' wa Hadarat Al'Arab Al'oula*, (The Land of Sheba and the First Arab civilizations) (Damascus: Dar Al Fikr, 1990). For a more recent study note: Jean-Francois Breton, *Arabia Felix From the Time of the Queen of Sheba: Eighth Century B.C. to First Century A.D.*, Translated from the French by Albert LaFarge, (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 1999). For further details on the progress of the pre-Islamic Arab civilization see above chapter 1.

<sup>35</sup> Prophet Muhammad's cousin, son in law and the fourth Muslim Caliph

Hence, he erased all of the spiritual capital that Arabia and its inhabitants ever had and will ever have.

**Saadeh's Historical Narration:**

The implications of Saadeh's negative image of the Arabs were clarified in his vision of the Islamic conquests of the Near East as being a historical mistake. He explicitly claimed that "the Syrian-Roman armies were able to overcome the Arab armies during the battle of *Yarmuk* several times, till the latter ones escaped, and did not reengage in battle if it was not for the Arab women's cries for help" (Saadeh, 1997: 96).

However, this narration lacks accuracy. It was clarified previously the Byzantine Near East was torn under both ethnic and religious rivalries during the aforementioned era. Thus, it is well known that a major factor of the successes of the Islamic conquests was the Near Eastern peoples' dismay with the Byzantines. This was manifested in their weak loyalty towards Byzantium during these wars (Hitti, 1949: 52).

Moreover, Saadeh claimed to have derived his historical portrayal of the Battle of *Yarmuk*, which was decisive in the fate of *Assham* during the Islamic conquests, from Alwaqidi's (748 - 822 A.D.) "*Futtuh A Sham*" ("The conquests of *Assham*"). Saadeh considered the aforesaid book to be one of "the most important Islamic Mohammedan sources" (Saadeh, 1997: 96). However it is agreed among both old and modern Arab historians that this book was not authentic. They clarified that the book contained several distortions and additions to its original script, particularly at the times of the crusades for the purpose of encouraging Muslim fighters and peoples at that era (Atwan, 1987: 118-119).

The book was written in an epical narrative that, curiously enough, resembles the ancient Greek epics. The book is a mixture of poetry and heroism, such as the brave encounters made by a lady fighter called Khawlah Bint AlAzwar, who had disguised herself as a masked male fighter (Alwaqidi, 1278 Hegri, vol.1: 46.) Furthermore, the book contains some events that do not support Saadeh's historical narration. For example the book includes a meeting between 'Amr Ibn Al'aas (a companion of Prophet Mohammad) and Constantine the son of the Byzantine emperor Heraclius. During this meeting the latter claimed that the Arabs were foreign intruders, while 'Amr defended his position by saying that *Assham* was ethnically and linguistically an Arab area. He claimed that the aforesaid region belonged to the ancient Arab people called *AlAmaleeq*. In response to this Constantine replied by affirming the validity of this claim (Alwaqidi, 1278 Hegri: Vol.II: 51-52). It is curious to say that Saadeh seems to have found such events as unnecessary details and did not mention them at all.

Moreover, the book illustrates high levels of courage and sacrifice among both Muslim male and female fighters unlike Saadeh's claims. Regardless of the authenticity of such an illustration by "*Futtuh Assham*" obviously Saadeh's account is extremely distant from the one we read in the book attributed to Alwaqidi.

Critical studies regarding the Islamic conquest of *Assham*, reveal that although the Battle of *Yarmuk* was decisive yet there were several other steps and battles through which the Islamic armies proved their military capabilities. Hence reducing the conquest of the whole region, into one battle does not seem to be accurate or scientifically justifiable.

The actual conquest of *Assham* had begun during the times of Prophet Muhammad, where he led an expedition against the Oasis of *Tabouk* in 630 A.D. north of Hejaz. He was able to subdue several tribes and settlements south of the region. Prophet Muhammad succeeded in forcing several towns to pay him an annual tribute while maintaining their religious beliefs and property such as Christian "*Ayala*" at the top of the Gulf of Aqaba and Adruh between Maa'an and Petra in today's southern Jordan (Hitti, 2002a, vol.II: 410).

After the death of the Prophet, the expansion of the Islamic armies still persisted. The new Islamic state under the first Caliph Abu-Baker, had sent three armies. One of which was led by Yazid bin Abu Suffyan,<sup>36</sup> at *Wadi 'Arabah* to the south of the "Dead Sea." This led to a series of successful engagements with the Byzantines by the Islamic armies. By 634 the Islamic armies were able to raid the southern part of Palestine and threatened both Casareia and cut off Jerusalem from the sea (Hitti, 2002a, vol.II: 412).

While the Byzantine emperor, Heraclius was preparing an army to face the Islamic armies, one of the historically most talented Arab military leaders, Khaled Bin AlWaleed, following the command of Caliph Abu Baker, to leave the Iraqi/Persian frontier, and join the Islamic fighters in *Assham*. Khaled probably passed through a waterless dessert route to reach the region and avoid the Byzantine forts. A task completed within 18 days. Only to begin his military success with defeating the Arab Ghasanides, who remained loyal to the Byzantines.

Later Khaled joined the other Islamic troops. They faced a strong Byzantine army in the battle of *Ajnadin*, on the 30<sup>th</sup> of July 634 A.D. This led him to control all of Palestine.

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<sup>36</sup> The brother of the first Umayyad Caliph, Mu'awiyah.

Afterwards another successful encounter against the Byzantines in *Marj AlSafr* took place near the gates of Damascus, which Khaled was able to conquer on September 635, after a six month siege (Hitti, 2002a, vol.II: 414). The Islamic troops were capable of subduing other major cities such as *Hims*, *B'alabak* and *Hammah*, while the Caseria, Jerusalem and some coastal cities remained with the Byzantines. Hence Heraclius raised a new huge army to defeat the Muslims (Hitti, 2002a, vol.II: 415).<sup>37</sup>

Consequently Khaled and the other army commanders withdrew from major cities within the region, such as Damascus and *Hims* and were concentrated in the valley of the *Yarmuk*, a tributary of the River Jordan. The scene of the battle, which was undermined by Saadeh, took place was a juncture of *Yarmuk* and its tributary, *al-Ruqqad*, whence the climax of the battle took place on August 20, 636. The Islamic troops were able to maneuver their Byzantine opponents into a tight position between the two streams of the *Yarmuk*. Some of the Byzantine warriors, who were Armenian and Arab mercenaries, were killed on the spot. Others were driven into the river, while some who were able to escape though the waters were slaughtered on the other side (Hitti, 2002a, vol.II: 415).

In conclusion one can see to which extent that the aforesaid historical narrative that relied on both Orientalist and traditional sources, illustrated the battle of *Yarmuk*. By comparison Saadeh's version of the same military encounter reveals serious impunity when dealing with both Arab and Islamic history.

The undermining of the *Yarmuk* and the underestimation of its Arab leader, Khaled bin AlWaleed, is not surprising yet it creates its own paradoxes. Saadeh maintained that

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 415

Hannibal, the Carthaginian leader and champion of the Punic wars,<sup>38</sup> as “The greatest military genius of all times” (Saadeh: n.d.: 40-41). He ignores the fact that the latter, poisoned himself after suffering a severe defeat at the hands of the Romans and witnessed his empire tumbling down before his eyes. On the other hand, Khaled was named “The Sword of Allah,” because of his military capabilities which were manifested in his military tactics in battles such as the abovementioned *Yarmuk* and impressively never lost a single battle in his life and died of natural causes. Furthermore, according to the Palestinian historian, Irfan Shahid, Khaled had achieved what Hannibal could not. He was capable of returning *Assham* region to the Semites from the hands of the Greeks and Romans (Shahid, 1987, 137-139.)

The erasure of the Arabic element reaches its climax in Saadeh’s case when he claimed that the Arabic language did not exist in “Syria” prior to the Islamic conquests. He claimed that it replaced “Syriac,” the language he assumed to be the sole native tongue in the region. Furthermore, he, and in contradiction to his abovementioned claims about the non existence of Arabs prior to Islam, considered that “Syria” was capable of absorbing the new conquering Arabs. He provided inaccurate historical parallels such as how the Romans invaded England, and changed its language from German to Latin (Saadeh, 1979: 126). Accordingly, He indicated that Arabic was also “alien” to “Syria” and that whatever Arabs who arrived in the aforesaid region were readily “Syrianized” (Saadeh, 1979: 126).

As mentioned earlier, Arabs were capable of infiltrating *Assham* since it is known that Arabic was spread in the inner parts of *Assham* and western Iraq (including the upper

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<sup>38</sup> Who was from Carthage near the Tunisian capital at present times, and did not engage in the Punic wars, which revealed his military capabilities, from Saadeh’s “Syria” but from his homeland in North Africa.

region of Iraq between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers, called *Aljazeera*) before Islam. Many inhabitants of the aforesaid areas were Arab, and were not simply “absorbed” by these areas, since they have brought with them their “language, ethos and forms of organization” (Hourani, 1992: 11). Hence, it was of little surprise that the Peasantry of the region were in the hills and mountains such as The Lebanon, Anti-Lebanon, Galilee, Palestine, Transjordan (today’s Jordan) composed of tribal Peasants, ‘*Asha’ir*. Their ecology was “partly agricultural, partly pastoral, hence the common designation of some tribal peasants as semi-nomads” (Salibi, 2009: 10).

Also, even the nomads were never alien to *Assham*. Bedouins lived their full pastoralism in the adjacent dessert, and influenced the rural areas in the region from time “immemorial.” At times they were able to invade these areas, and sometimes the towns and cities, once they had the opportunity. On the economic level, agricultural cultivation and pastoralism were interdependent, thus the *Shami’ Asha’ir* made “fleeting alliances” with the fully bedouins in order to manage the relationship between both parties (Salibi, 2009: 11).

Moreover, by the 7<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. Arab tribes were capable to infiltrate *Assham* highlands at the Orontes Valley, Mount Hermon, Galilee and southern Lebanon. They capitalized on this situation by marking their names on certain areas, such as *Wadi ATayem*, east of today’s Lebanon, after the tribe *Taym Allah ibn Tha’labah*, *Jabal ‘Amel* in northern Galilee, named after the Yemeni tribe of ‘*Amelah*, and the northern mountain Of *Bahra’*, so called after the name of the an Arab tribe. Such a huge Arab influx was clearly facilitated by the severe rivalry between both great empires in the Near East, the Sassanid Persians and the Byzantines (Salibi: 15-16).

In fact, one of the reasons of the swiftness of the Islamic conquests was that large parts of the rural areas along with some towns and cities, were Arabized long before the Islamic infiltrations. Some Christian Arab fighters or tribes actually aided the Muslims in seizing the region (Salibi, 2009: 18).

Contrary to what some might believe, the Arab infiltration had begun far long before the rise of Islam as mentioned earlier.<sup>39</sup> Hence once more Saadeh's "Syrian" historical narrative loses another of its foundations. Furthermore his idea that once the Arabs settled in *Assham* they lose their old tribal organization is not accurate, as in the case of the highland abovementioned 'Asha'er.

Even the cities that were built by the Arabs maintained their tribal order such as Palmyra (2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.). It was ruled by its famous queen Zenobia and her husband Udaynath who was named by a Greek historian as the "King of the Saracens (Arabs)" (Hitti, 2002a, vol.1: 392) a "camel aristocracy" which preserved its Arab tribal organization (Zaharan, 2001: 26).

Furthermore the Islamic conquest, in accordance with Salibi, opened the door for huge continuous Arab bedouin infiltrations for centuries later intensifying their traditional feuds between *Qays* (northern Arabians) and *Kalb* (southern Arabians).<sup>40</sup> This makes Saadeh's claim that the first Umayyad Caliph Mu'awiyah, was "Syrianized", and established a "Syrian state" rather than an Arab one (Saadeh, 1994: 195) lacks historical credentials. Mu'awiyah and his successors were dependent militarily on Arab tribes. This

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<sup>39</sup> For further details See above p.31

<sup>40</sup> Kamal Salibi, *Syria Under Islam: 634-1097*, p.19 and p.26, note also chapter 3 titled "Tribalism Ascendant:906-977," which reveals the continuity of tribal infiltration and control in the region.



led the Umayyads to indulge in the affairs of the tribes and *'Ash'er*, which hindered their efforts to establish a stable imperial administration (Salibi: 2009:25).

To be just to Saadeh, the assumption that once tribes were sedentarized they lose their tribal ties, is common among some researchers and writers, both Arabs and Europeans. Yet in the case of *Assham*, Iraq and even the Arab World this is not accurate. This is evident by the Arab sociologist, Halim Barakat, as he pointed out that Arab peasants till this day were a community of extended families that pursued their lifestyle through agricultural cultivation. Hence, what differentiates the Arab peasant from his bedouin compatriot is the former's adherence and appreciation of his land along with his kinship ties (Barakat, 1993: 55).

Barakat also noted that numerous villages in the Arab World carry the names of "*Beit*", "*Kafir*" or "*Bani*", hence indicating the historical relationship between the social organization of villagers and that of bedouin tribes (Barakat, 1993: 55). Therefore, it was only natural to find that Arab peasants acquired social practices that are similar to those of their desert dwellers, such as endogamous marriages and resolving family feuds informally outside official courts. Also the adherence to family ties in both cases is unwritten and is based on informal trust and unwritten understanding between the members of each clan (Barakat, 1993: 55 and 59).

Accordingly, it is of little wonder that a study of the Palestinian villages in the 1970(s) found that each village was "a family of families," meaning that kinship and villages were two interdependent entities: The family provides identity and social security, while the village provides the land as the means of livelihood (Barakat, 1993: 56.)

### **“ Syria” in Saadeh’s Imagination:**

In order to deeply comprehend Saadeh’s position, one has to examine his view of “Syria.” The main theme herein is that Saadeh revealed a sense of disdain towards anything “eastern.” This was clearly manifested in his commentary on a statement made by one of the French officials regarding greater Syria, in which he focused on its eastern belonging. Saadeh’s reaction was furious to say the least and refused any association between “Syria” and the “east.” In a responsive article to the aforementioned statement, he claimed that “Syria” is not an “eastern nation” but rather a “Mediterranean” one. He stated clearly that the “Syrian psyche” differs from the “eastern one which should not be overlooked by any empire’s commissioner in the remote [imperial] African or Asian territories” (Saadeh, 1993: 72). Saadeh concluded that this statement “should be addressed to the peoples who belong to the eastern psyche. However, once it is addressed to the Syrian Nation then it is considered to be a degradation and an assault on its dignity” (Saadeh, 1993: 74). Thus, it is clear that Saadeh’s discontent with this categorization does not stem from any humanitarian base, but rather from excluding the “Syrian nation” from the “Mediterranean” elite group of states. He obviously believed in the colonial “rights” of the stronger states over the weaker ones but he frowned upon the exclusion of “Syria” from these affairs.

Saadeh attempted to implement such ideals. Hence, it is not surprising to see him placing other Arab countries under the wing of this judgmental disdain for the “east.” Thus, he categorized one of the most renowned Egyptian writers in that era, i.e. Mohammad Hussein Haikal, as having “an Egyptian eastern psyche” which in Saadeh’s opinion “represents a vision that differs from the course of the Syrian psyche.” Hence,

Saadeh affirms that the "Syrians" do not subscribe to such a view, because they are not "eastern." Thus everything they took from the Arab, Persian and Indian literatures is a result of "the diminishing of their vision of life and because of the loss of their higher ideals due to the succession of the invasions [over Syria] which resulted in the disturbance of the flow of the Syrian social and spiritual life" (Saadeh, 1978: 20).

#### **Inventing "Syrian" Tradition:**

In the abovementioned paragraph it is observed how Saadeh was attempting to "invent" a new tradition for "Syria." where he insisted that the "Syrians" ought to abandon the "eastern" music or culture, and attempt to imitate the western symphonies such as the ones composed by the German musician Wagner. Saadeh believed that they should "compose music from the acquired glory with the victory of the best, noblest and strongest [nations] over the worst, the vilest and most humble ones, and to realize the importance of a new vision of life, the universe and art" (Saadeh, 1978: 47).<sup>41</sup> The further detachment from the "east," reaches a climax as Saadeh criticized some of his fellow "Syrians" for actually listening to the rising singing star in the Arab World at that era, the Egyptian Um Kalthum. He considered her singing style to be both "eastern" and "primitive," admitting at the same time that his contemporary "Syrians" positively responded to this type of singing (Saadeh, 1978: 47).

Saadeh also elaborated on the necessity of this "new tradition" to include the ancient history of "Syria." It should involve the glories of the "Syrian" nation such as Carthage (Saadeh, 1978: 47) or deriving its inspirations from the newly discovered excavations (at his era) in Ugarit, where several epics had been revealed. Such epics

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p.47

should, in his view, be the source of inspiration for the "Syrian" writers and poets,<sup>42</sup> instead of the Arab "primitive" and "barbaric" literature. The latter in Saadeh's dictionary lacks "philosophical themes or magical beauty" (Saadeh, 1978: 47). Therefore, with immense clarity, this was deliberate reconstruction and "invention" of new artistic and literary styles and themes. Saadeh had demanded his fellow "Syrians" to subscribe to such "traditions," in order to escape the "barbaric east" and face the modern advanced "West."

#### **Saadeh and the Arab "Nations":**

At times it is confusing that Saadeh used other remarks towards the other Arab "nations."<sup>43</sup> He claimed that there are strong bonds amongst these "sister" nations. According to his vision, an "Arab front" should be established, and affirms that "Syria" will never surrender its position as the leading nation among the other Arab "nations" (Saadeh, N.D.: 66-67).

One should keep in mind that Saadeh had subscribed, as it was previously mentioned, to Friedrich Ratzel's notion that a nation should not limit ("Suffocate" in Saadeh's terminology) itself within its boundaries. The nation should rather extend its territorial control over other territories (the German *Lebensraum* or "living space"). Saadeh used the Phoenician expansion over North Africa (e.g. Carthage) as his primary example (Saadeh, 1994: 71).

Saadeh did not associate the present North Africans with the ancient Carthaginians. He claimed that the latter did not racially mix with the former. In fact, Saadeh manifests a

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p.61

<sup>43</sup> According to the Syrian national scenario the Arab world is divided into four nations: the "Syrian" nation, the Nile Valley nation (i.e. Egypt and Sudan), The Arabian nation (i.e. Saudi Arabia, the Gulf Sheikdoms and Yemen) and finally the *Maghrib* (i.e. North Africa's Arab countries).

less than impressed assessment of the Arab conquest of North Africa. He believed that the Arabs were of a superior race, since they are Semites, while the inhabitants of North Africa were Berber, i.e. an inferior one. He asserted that the Arabs made a mistake by racially mixing with the Berbers, which resulted in the creation of a racial fusion that is at a middle degree between both the superior race and the inferior one. However, this middle position tends to lean more towards inferiority rather than the opposite direction.<sup>44</sup>

Henceforth, Saadeh's discourse about the "Arab front," becomes clear provided that one adds the aforementioned ideas promoted by Saadeh together. To put this in a more comprehensible manner: Saadeh considered Arabians to be "primitive" bedouins till our current times, and since he considered the Egyptians as being "eastern" with all of the social and cultural inferiority that he attaches to this categorization. The North African Arabs being, according to his classification, a result of a hybrid "inferior" racial fusion. Then all of his statements about the relations between "Syria" and the Arabs come in place. In the aforementioned context Saadeh found "Syria's" *Lebensraum* amongst the other Arab "nations." Also one must keep in mind that Saadeh did express a wish to be a subscriber among the western states' "Mediterranean" club. Hence from this perspective he was securing "Syria's" position as the dominant force and magnet in the Arab world.

Saadeh extended his assessment of the Islamic conquest to reach a point of a practical erasure of its consequences. He said that "it was fortunate for Syria that the armies of the

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<sup>44</sup> Antoun Saadeh, *Almohadrat al'shr* (The Ten Lectures), (Beirut: Dar Fikr, 1998), p.72. It is worth considering the fact that Saadeh, although he looks down upon this Berber-Arab mixture, yet he seems to admire and heavily depend on one of sons of that same "racial mixture", i.e. Abdul Rahaman Ibn Khaldoun and his *Muqqadimah*. He also seems to be unaware of the fact that both Iraq and *Assham* were conquered by the Muslims within a few years, while it took the Arabs a century to subdue North Africa' Berbers, which shows that they were not as feeble or weak as he assumed, at least not in comparison with the "Syrians." On the Muslim conquests and their dates note: Peter Mansfield, *The Arabs*, 3rd ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1992) 32-38

[Islamic] conquest did not stop at its territory but their waves continued to move eastwards, westwards and southwards” (Saadeh, 1994: 194). Hence, the conquest was a historical “mistake” that was soon erased and the continuity of the “Syrian nation” pursued without disturbance according to this scenario.

However, Saadeh made these assertions without any historical references. It is not surprising to find out that his assertion is far from being accurate. In fact the Islamic armies did not leave “Syria” without settlement. On the contrary, the Islamic army was divided into two groups, one continued to conquer the northern part of today’s Syria, and it strengthened its settlements in most areas in today’s Syria and Lebanon. The other one conquered Palestine and was also divided into groups. One settled in Palestine while the other went to conquer Egypt. It is worth mentioning that the Muslims lived in the homes that were abandoned by groups that have fled the territory to go to Byzantine one, and the Muslims also shared some of the houses with the remaining inhabitants (AlAli, 1983: 59-64).

To illuminate the gravity of Saadeh’s abovementioned historical fallacy, one can simply mention that the Muslim conquerors upon their conquests built and settled in two cities in today’s Iraq: *AlBasra* and *AlKuffa*. The Iraqi historian Saleh Ahmad AlAli estimates the inhabitants of both cities to have reached almost more than a million individuals (AlAli, 1983:25-26).

Saadeh also attempted to erode the effect of the Islamic conquest via another method. He insinuated that many of the Arab conquerors were of the northern “Arabized” Arabs, who were according to Saadeh of Canaanite ancestry (the descendants of Ishmael) (Saadeh, 1998: 62). Hence according to this scenario prophet Mohammad is originally a

“Syrian” and the Islamic conquests were a “return” of “Syria’s” children to their mother land. (Saadeh, 1998: 83). This affirmation lacks historical grounding. Historical research proved that the majority of the Arabs in *Assham*, whether before or after the Islamic conquest, were of a southern Arabian Yemeni descent not of a northern one.<sup>45</sup>

Saadeh clearly was unable to distinguish between Arabism and Islam, due to the fact that he considered that the former to be the latter in disguise. His disdain for the Arabs was elaborated. Hence, Arabia according to his account regarding its primitiveness should be spiritually bankrupt. Thus the religion that emerged from the aforesaid peninsula, in this case Islam, must be also primitive. Saadeh capitalized on this notion and did make claims about how “Mohammedan jurisprudence” is unsuitable for “Syria.” In fact, Saadeh did say that explicitly as he claimed that “what is good” for Arabia may not be “good” for “Syria.” He gave a practical example as he criticized the *Wudu’*, the pre-prayer cleansing Islamic ritual, and said that this practice was needed in Arabia due to the scarcity of water therein. Thus, in “Syria” where water is available a Muslim can compensate that by bathing once or twice a week (Saadeh, 1998: 195).

It is necessary to highlight that such claims do not correspond with Islam as it is currently known and for different reasons, other than those mentioned by Saadeh. The *Wudu’* ritual is a practice of worship where one, unlike a bath, washes certain parts (i.e. “partial ablution”), of his body with water in an orderly fashion. However, the *Wudu’* does not include washing more hygiene sensitive body organs such the genitals. Moreover, as it was mentioned, the *Wudu’* should be practiced in cleaning the body

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<sup>45</sup> There are many studies that confirm this assertion, note for example: Khalil Athamina, *Filisteen fi Khamsat Qouroon: Min Alfath Al Islamy hata Al Ghazu Alfrianji* (Palestine in Five Centuries: From the Islamic Conquest to the Frankish Invasion (634-1099), (Beirut: Institute For Palestine Studies, 2000), p.43

organs in a certain order without altering that arrangement. Thus, washing the ears in the *Wudu'* before the elbows is religiously unacceptable. In addition to that, the *Wudu'* ritual is negated and needs to be repeated for prayers provided a person excretes or releases air from his/her rear, however if he/she releases gases from the mouth then this would not negate the *Wudu'*.

Furthermore to show the metaphysical insinuation that the *Wudu'* encompasses, one should note that if water was scarce, as Saadeh suggested, a Muslim can rub his hands and face with clean sand, this ritual is called *Tayamum*. Also the cleansing rituals of Islam reveal that it emerged in an urban environment,<sup>46</sup> where water is relatively abundant, not a bedouin one, as Saadeh assumed.

Moreover, bathing does exist in Islam. It is called *Ghusl* (i.e. full ablution), which includes washing all of the body parts. Thus the metaphysical, spiritual and symbolic aspects of *Wudu'* are apparent. Such knowledge concerning Islamic worships is extremely basic to the average Muslim, which in turn reveals that Saadeh's knowledge of the aforesaid religion appears to be tentative.

Saadeh provided further "evidences" for the alienation of Islamic practices from "Syria." He gave the example of polygamy and claimed that this condition is associated with Arabia's dry weather which fumes sexual instincts, thus being an unnecessary practice in "Syria" (Saadeh, 1997: 38). However, such an allegation opposes historical facts; especially that "Syria" with its ancient civilizations had accommodated polygamy to be an accepted practice. In ancient Mesopotamia girls were married at the age of only 11 or 12 (Tannahill, 1990: 53-57). Furthermore "Syria", particularly in Mesopotamia,

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<sup>46</sup> For more details on this issue not above, p. 31



knew the practices of sacred prostitution that were blessed by the goddess Ishtar (Tannahill, 1990: 70-71).

Saadeh tackled many religious issues; however, what is most intriguing is his insistence on his "civilized Syria" as opposed to the barbarian Arabia. Thus, according to this categorization Christ is a "Syrian" and his message developed in "Syria." Moreover, Saadeh claimed that Christ was not a Jew and attempted to use some easily refutable verses from the New Testament to verify this point (Saadeh, 1997:22). The ultimate logical conclusion herein, which Saadeh avoids to express explicitly, is that "Mohammedan. Islam" is an alien to the "Syrian nation" therefore the national "Syrian" religion is Christianity, since it was the product of "Syria."

Saadeh's treatment of Islam was of a confused nature. For example, he claimed in his foremost study of religion that the contemporary research-at his time- proved that most of Prophet Mohammad's *Hadith*<sup>47</sup> is unauthentic. Hence, he concluded that the *Hadith* must be disregarded by "Mohammedans."<sup>48</sup> The main problem herein is that Saadeh did not site any sources whatsoever to prove the aforesaid point about the *Hadith*. In fact, Saadeh used the *Hadith* in several parts of the abovementioned religious study of his (Saadeh, 1997: 82).

Saadeh attempted to unite both Christianity and "Mohammedanism" under one banner: Islam. The reason for this was manifested in his reference the Koranic verse which explicitly says "And whoever desires a religion other than Islam, it shall not be

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<sup>47</sup> The Hadith is whatever Prophet Mohammad said, did or approved of, and was recorded according to certain criteria during the eighth and ninth centuries A.D. It contains most of the acts of worship in particular and Islamic jurisprudence in general.

<sup>48</sup> Antoun Saadeh, *Al Islam fi resalatieh: Almasehyyah wa Almohamdyyah* (Islam in it's two Messages: Christianity and Mohammedanism), p. 19

accepted from him, and in the hereafter he shall be one of the losers.” (Koran, no.3, Verse no.85). Therefore, Saadeh claimed that Christians are also Muslims since Islam means submission to a sole god. Hence, he attempted to bridge the gap between both faiths. The Koran explicitly denies the crucifixion of Christ (Koran, no. 4, Verse no. 157), yet Saadeh avoided this fact and trivialized it by claiming that the notion it encompasses is an imitation of the Gospel of Barnabas, which was written, according Saadeh, to “degrade” Christ (Saadeh, 1997: 161). Furthermore, Saadeh claimed that the Koran “amended” its vision of Christ’s birth to enable itself to communicate with the “uncultured Arab mentality.” This is to illustrate that Arabs were too primitive to accept the birth of Christ without an intercourse and thus god having a son (Saadeh, 1997: 154). However, the concept of having the holy trinity is totally rejected by Islam. Thus the issue is not related to how the son emerged but rather his status and relation to the other holy persons that are distinct. This concept is totally against the Islamic notion of god which constitutes the existence of one entity without any separations or distinctions and furthermore this Muslim god is unseen by humans let alone having a son of a divine nature (Koran, no. 19, verse no.35). Also the Christian concept of Christ’s salvation and that Christ was the bearer of the sins of humanity is unknown in Islam.

Curiously enough Saadeh accepted the New Testament from Christianity, and rejected the Old Testament. He claimed that Christ was a reformer of “Syria” and was freeing the “Syrians” from the “rigid” Jewish jurisprudence (Saadeh, 1997: 78-81). Furthermore, the “Syrian” Christ was, according to Saadeh, the one with the message “that retrieved the Syrian vision of life which stipulates focusing rationality on the course

of history” (Saadeh, 1997: 78). Hence, affirming that Christianity is a “Syrian” religion, while Islam is an Arab one; i.e. “foreign.”

However such a historic narrative lacks serious merits, since it is known that at the beginning of Christianity, the new faith was confined to Jewish gatherings and it did not gain its Hellenistic character, until Saint Paul, who was himself originally a Jew. He was the one that was able to bridge the gap between Christianity and Greek culture (Hitti, 2002a: 330-331). One is left herein with a peculiar situation: an amputated Christianity (without the Old Testament) and a foreign primitive Mohammedanism. This leads to question Saadeh’s goal by making such claims.

#### **Saadeh’s Political and Social Ideals:**

Saadeh did mention several illuminating points regarding his ideals. He said clearly that “every nation that wishes to live a free independent life...should have a firm spiritual unity. He further elaborated that the “Syrian nation” should have “one vision of life, the universe and art via the same standards and concepts”(Saadeh, 1998: 128). He persistently used metaphors to compare his Syrian nationalism with religion. He said, for example, “the world had witnessed in these lands religions landing from the heavens to earth, but today it is witnessing a new religion [stemming] from the land, elevating the souls with a red cyclone”<sup>49</sup> He also said “You [partisans] had believed in me as the teacher and guide of the nation and mankind, the planner and builder of the society...” (Yamak, 1969: 117).

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<sup>49</sup> Al Islam fi resalatieh: Almasehyah wa Almohamdyah (Islam in it's two Messages: Christianity and Mohammedanism). Beirut: Dar Fikr, 1997, p.129, the red cyclone is a swastika-similar figure which happens to be the S.S.N.P.’s symbol

Accordingly, a new religion has emerged and Saadeh was its prophet as this was later affirmed by Saadeh's "disciples" and partisans. They spread stories about his supernatural powers, such as being able to have walked and talked when he was 7 months old. Furthermore Assad Alashqar, one of the S.S.N.P. former leaders, said that Saadeh was "the new prophet of Syria, its teacher and guide" (Yamak, 1969: 118).

However, Saadeh's new religion remained ambiguous as he only discussed a unity between matter and spirit (*madrahyya* in Arabic). Yet the connotations and implications of such unity remained to be obscure and open for interpretation.

It was clear from the above stated discussion that Saadeh remained a subscriber to an extremely negative notion of both Arabs and Islam. He considered himself to be the leader and implicitly the prophet of a "Syrian nation" that shall eradicate any foreign rule and its effects; in this case Arabism and Islam. Hence he was willing to attach himself and his "nation" to the Christian Mediterranean west and to avoid the barbaric east with its Arabs, Islam, bedouins etc. to attempt to retrieve the "civilized Syria" which had been scarred by the aforementioned entities. The racist foundation of his analysis is only a manifestation of a young man from Mount Lebanon who subscribed to his society's myths of anti Arabism and Islamophobia. Furthermore, his secularism is totally overrated as it was illustrated that the totalitarian zeal that encompasses his doctrines, as he was portrayed as a "teacher, leader etc." who is leading "Syria" to heavens. Hence, he is not sectarian because he was attempting to form his own sect with himself being its leader and prophet.

Also Saadeh was keen on reviving the ancient past. He was deeply indulged in a process of "reinventing" the "Syrian" literature and music, in order to abandon its eastern

orientation, in order to follow on the footsteps of the advanced "West" in an obvious sober and conscious process and propaganda.

It is clear that Saadeh's attempt to "rewrite" history was an intentional act, as it is the case in what Anderson labeled as "formal nationalism." It lacked any historical ground and illustrated an extreme bias against entities such as Arabs and Islam. He did not rely on facts but depended on intuition. His ideas were tailored to suit his Syrian nationalism regardless of any empirical or sociological basis. It is worth noting, however, the audience that he had addressed and was keen to win for his nationalistic ideas, that found such a historical narrative concerning "Syria" to be rather appealing.

## Chapter 6

### The Sources of Saadeh's Thought:

Before examining Saadeh's followers, there is a question that imposes itself upon the observer: where did Saadeh attain such ideas? The evidence suggests that he derived his thoughts regarding greater "Syria" via a Jesuit missionary colonial scholar called Henri Lammens (Pipes, 1990: 42).

As mentioned earlier, Lammens illustrated his views regarding "Greater Syria"<sup>50</sup> in his book *La Syrie: Percis Historique* (Syria: A Short History),<sup>51</sup> which took place after the French triumph over Faisal's Arab kingdom and the establishment of "Greater Lebanon" in 1920. He clearly stated that he has written this work upon on the request of the French High Commissioner in Syria and Lebanon, General Henri Gouraud. This was neither unusual nor unexpected, since Lammens was a clear advocate of the French "mission" in the Levant. He conveniently expressed his views in the aforesaid book, which constituted a firm belief in the existence of a "Syrian Nation," with clear frontiers. Therefore, according to Lammens "Syria" extended from the Mediterranean to the Taurus Mountains, reaching the Syrian dessert. However, he subscribed to the belief that the "rugged topography" of the region hindered the development of a "national consciousness" among the inhabitants and prevented political unity therein. Hence, he indicated that the only way for the "Syrian Nation" to be united is under the banner of the French mandate, which its functionaries found in his ideas the suitable ideological powers for their policy in the region. In particular, he considered the "true Syrians," who

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<sup>50</sup> Note that Lammens's "Syria" corresponds to Saadeh's first definition of the Syrian Nation, as it included today's Lebanon, Syrian republic, Jordan, Palestine and part of northern Iraq as it will be briefly elaborated.

<sup>51</sup> See above p.52 and forward.

were able to escape the “Arab invasion” and the “oppressive” Islamic rule, were the inhabitants of Mount Lebanon. Thus, he distinguished the “Syrians” from the Arabs. At the same time he offered a justification of the creation of the state of “Greater Lebanon,” and provided an ideological cover for the policies of the French authorities at that era (Salibi: 132-135).

Lammens discussed how “Syria” had distinct boundaries and faced the Mediterranean. In turn, these boundaries made the “Syrians” open to western influences more than the eastern ones (Lammens, 1921, vol. I: 1-2). It is exactly what Saadeh adopted, when he considered “Syria” as a non eastern nation but a Mediterranean one.<sup>52</sup>

Lammens also claimed that Christianity had “distinguished Syrian Hellenistic characteristics.” This reminds us of Saadeh’s assumption that the aforesaid faith was actually a “Syrian” one. Also Lammens’s claim struck a chord among the Melchite Christians (which were divided into Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholics), by including their historical “diocese of Antioch” (Salibi, 2003: 132).

Accordingly, it was only natural that Lammens claimed that Syria witnessed its most prosperous era when it was a Roman province. At a later stage it was inherited by Byzantium (Lammens, 1921: vol. I: 11). This directly intersected with Saadeh’s previously discussed writings. Lammens mentioned the existence of a “Syrian race” that distinguished the “Syrians” from their “Arab, Anatolian, Egyptian, and Iraqi” neighbors. He considered that this is obvious from the first glance even for the ones who suffer from a weakness in their eyesight (Lammens, 1921: vol. I: 5). This corresponds exactly with

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<sup>52</sup> See above p.88

what Saadeh discussed regarding the physical features of the "Syrians" and their distinction from the Egyptians, as it was previously mentioned.

Furthermore, Lammnes considered that the Arabs were permanently aggravating neighbors of the "Syrians" from the Euphrates, to the southern parts of "Syria" reaching the Suez Canal (Lammens, 1921: vol. I: 5-6). Yet, according to the aforesaid Belgian scholar, the "Syrians" were capable of absorbing such "invaders" Lammens, 1921: vol. I: 6). He considered them to be cowardly worriers that are only interested in plundering and destruction.<sup>53</sup> This exactly intersects with Saadeh's abovementioned view of the Arabs and the Islamic conquests.

According to Lammens, the best, and probably the only, prosperous Islamic era for "Syria" was the one under the Umayyads. He claimed that their state was a "Syrian" not Arab (Salibi, 2003: 133). As any observer would notice that this was exactly what Saadeh had claimed.

Apparently Lammens's appraisal of the Ummyads in his work regarding the history of Islam, that he had a special contempt to it was a result of his failure in spreading Christianity among Muslims (Salibi, 1964: 333). This is clarified by the fact that he attacked Faisal and his Arab kingdom severely, hence "lashing", the former's ancestor, Ali bin Abi Taleb describing him as "obese, ugly, timid, and immoral" and subject to Fatima who was "dull" and "complaining" (Rodinson, 1981: 26).<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Maxime Rodinson, "A Critical Survey of Modern studies on Mohammad", in Marlin L. Swartz (ed. and trans.), *Studies on Islam*, ( New York: Oxford University, 1981), p.26. It is worth noting that Rodinson considered Lammens to be the scholar who had dominated the European studies on Prophet Mohammad during the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>54</sup> Maxime Rodinson, "A Critical Survey of Modern studies on Mohammad", p.26



Also Hitti's appraisal of the Umayyads was, according to Kamal Salibi, attributed to the fact that they were the "black sheep" of Islam. Lammens regarded them positively because of the doubts that concerned their religious piety, unlike their successors, the Abbasids (Salibi, 1964: 339). Once more such ideas and considering the Abbasids as religious fanatics were also totally adopted by Saadeh (Saadeh, 1994: 196-197).

In treating Islam, Lammens claimed that the spread of Islam was an "unfortunate" incident in "Syria's" history.<sup>55</sup> He attempted to adopt Ignaz Goldziher's (a Hungarian Orientalist) method to study Prophet Mohammad's life. Goldziher maintained that much of Mohammad's *Hadith* was a forgery, especially in its anti Umayyad inclination since it was compiled during the Abbasid times. He indicated that the creation of unauthentic *Hadith* was to fill the gaps in the Islamic jurisprudence at that era. Hence, reverting to the Koran and the early *Hadith*, while seriously criticizing the latter versions of the Islamic tradition, were the only means to write a scientific study regarding early Islam and Prophet Mohammad's life (Salibi, 1964: 333-334).

On the other hand, Lammens apparently used Goldziher's method abruptly. He wrote about Mohammad's life in an eclectic manner. He used the accounts that were unfavorable to the prophet whom he considered to be devious and "lascivious."<sup>56</sup> He also accepted uncritically any thing that praised the Umayyads (Salibi, 1964: 335). Furthermore, according to the Egyptian researcher Abdul Rahman Badawi, Lammens's use of such techniques was conducted without any clear scientific evidence. Lammens did not use other sources, such as the Talmudic or Hellenic ones which Goldziher had

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<sup>55</sup> Needless to say this is what Saadeh had implied as we have seen previously.

<sup>56</sup> Maxime Rodinson, "A Critical Survey of Modern studies on Mohammad", p.26

utilized in his studies, therefore this indicated that his research is biased and definitely tailored towards his ends and prejudgments (Badawi, 1993: p,504).

Badawi further revised the sources used by Lammens in his book "*Fatima et la filles de Mahomet*." He noticed that many of the citations included in the aforesaid work, were either not found at all in the sources or they were interpreted in an extremely biased manner (Badawi, 1993: 504.) Moreover, according to Maxime Rodinson, Goldziher commented on Lammens's methodology by saying "what would remain of the Gospels if he [Lammens] applied to them the same methods he applied to the Koran?"(Rodinson, 1981: 26).

Saadeh, throughout his book *Noshou' Al'Ummum* never used Lammens as a source, possibly because of the latter's attachment to the French Mandate which the former was resisting. However, there are two indirect proofs which illustrate that Saadeh had been aware of Lammens's book and notions regarding "*La Syrie*." First is the former party leader and one of Saadeh's "disciples", Issam AlMaheiry, had directly indicated that Lammens asserted "the existence of Syria as a geographical reality in the middle of the Arab World" (AlMaheiry, 1985: 16). Second, and quite recently, another former party leader, Gibran Arajji, amidst his argument against the Maronite researcher and priest, Salim 'Abou, had used Lammens as a reference to affirm the existence of the "Syrian Nation." This along with AlMuheiry's example and parallels between Saadeh and the Jesuit historian proves that that the founder of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party derived at least some of his ideas from Lammens.

Yamak claimed that Saadeh had formulated his nationalistic ideas while he was an immigrant in Brazil, and it was unlikely that he read Lammens's work which was

published in Beirut. He also shed some doubts about the extent of Saadeh's fluency in French (Yamak: 1969: 53-54). Yet such assumptions are not accurate since Saadeh during the years when he first arrived in Beirut in the early 1930 (s) could have easily reached and read Lammens's book. Also, regarding his capability in reading French, it is noted that one of Saadeh's sympathizers asserted that latter spoke the French along with other languages such as Portuguese, English and later German (Assab'i, 1999: 122).

Another source which indirectly could have exposed him to Lammens's ideas was Philip Hitti's book, "*Surryah Was Al Surryoun Min nafithat AlTarik*" (Syria and the Syrian throughout History). Hitti attempted to prove the existence of a "Syrian Nation." This fact is vital since Saadeh admired his works and used his book: "The Syrians in America" in *Noshou' Al'Ummum* (Saadeh, 1994: 24). Saadeh also, according to one of his disciples, looked at Hitti's research with the utmost respect.<sup>57</sup>

Hitti's book reiterated Lammens's scenario regarding Syria's history. Hitti asserted that "Syrians" are mainly Semitic, yet they are a "fusion" of different peoples, due to the tremendous groups which had invaded or penetrated this territory (Hitti, 1926: 12).<sup>58</sup> He surveyed the different peoples that inhabited "Syria", from the earliest times till the Arabs, who he considered to have had "extorted" this area (Hitti, 1926:18). Hitti, also, asserted that the "Syrian" racial fusion was composed of Aramaic Christians, Muslims who are a mixture of Arabs and Christians, and the Druzes that are considered to be

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<sup>57</sup> One of Saadeh's close companions, said that the former had sent letters to Hitti, in America asking him for details regarding the "Syrian Homeland", note: Gubran Jreij, *Ma' Antoun Saadeh: Min 8 February 1932 ila 8 Tamouz 1949* (With Antoun Saadeh: From February 8<sup>th</sup> 1932 till the 8<sup>th</sup> of July 1949), ( N.P., The Author, 1971?), pp. 134-135

<sup>58</sup> Philip Hitti, *Surryah Was Al Surryoun Min nafithat AlTarik* (Syria and the Syrian throughout History), (New York: AlMatba'ah Altijariyah AlSuruyah, 1926), p. 12

Arabs (Hitti, 1926:39). Hence it is clear that the Lebanese sectarian divisions were an aspect of his vision of the "Syrian homeland."

As it was the case with Lammens, Hitti placed great emphasis on Mount Lebanon. He admitted that it was in ancient times a barren mountain without any human inhabitants(Hitti, 1926:29). Yet at later stages, it was inhabited by different peoples, mainly the Christian Maronites, who had kept their "Syriac" language till the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>59</sup> Hitti even considered, as Lammens, that the Aramaic decent of the "Syrians" is the base for the "modern Syrian nation's nationalism" (Hitti, 1926: 36). Hitti even used Lammen's estimations of the Islamic conquest to undermine the Arabs which infiltrated "Syria" after this incident (Hitti, 1926: 34).

Furthermore, Hitti correlated between being "Syrianized" and being "Christianized." He claimed that some of the pre-Islamic Arabs that infiltrated the region were "Syrianized" via their conversion to Christianity (Hitti, 1926: 33). This reveals the Christian aspect that the concept of "Syria" encompasses.

Hitti, also, considered that "Syria" had its heyday in the Islamic times under the leadership of the Umayyads. This was particularly the case with their first caliph Mu'awiyah, who was kind and had drawn Christians close to his court (Hitti, 1926: 74). Hitti also claimed that the aforesaid dynasty, apparently following Lammens, was "Syrian" rather than Arab (Hitti, 1926:80). Nothing matches the Umayyads independent and glorious era in "Syria's" history, according to Hitti, except the Seleucid era in the fourth Century B.C., when Antioch was the capital of the region and its vast empire that reached Armenia, Iraq and Egypt (Hitti, 1926:75-76). Here is a clear echo of Saadeh's

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p.36

claim that Syria was “free” at that era, as it was mentioned earlier that the Umayyads were actually “Syrianized” ((Hitti, 1926: 86).

Hitti asserted, along with Lammens, that the Maronites were actually Aramaic tribes belonging to two clans, one is called “*Aljarajimah*” and the other is “*AlMaradah*” (Merdites). They held a stronghold against the Islamic powers that had to reach a financial settlement with them in order to avoid their raids. Hitti added, the Maronites remained speaking Arameaean in some of their northern villages till the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and kept Syriac as the language of their liturgy till present times ((Hitti, 1926: 37-38). Accordingly, he gave the Maronites a sense of originality within the groups living in “Syria.” Thence, it could be said that Saadeh, had adopted the historical narrative of Lammens whether directly or through Philip Hitti’s abovementioned book.<sup>60</sup> Hence, the novelty of Saadeh’s thought loses its appeal. His historical narrative about the history of “Syria” and the Arabs was nothing further than repeating Lammens’s and Hitti’s claims regarding the history of the region. Saadeh, as mentioned earlier, could have used other sources regarding both Islam and the Arabs, yet he did not, which reveals that the aforesaid account of *Assham*’s past suited only his ideas.<sup>61</sup>

Another source for Saadeh’s ideas, especially for both Arabs and Islam, is the German Orientalist Martin Hartman (1851- 1918). Saadeh used the latter’s work almost as an exclusive source when he discussed the Islamic state (Saadeh, 1994: 191-200).

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<sup>60</sup> It seems that further research within the history of the Arabs and Islam gave Hitti a more sober and a less ideological view of the his history of *Assham* and the Arabs, which we have witnessed in his later works, such as *History of the Arabs* and *History of Syria including Lebanon and Palestine*, although both books arguably still have their biases. For a severe criticism of Hitti’s history of the Arabs note: Shawqi Abu Khalil, *Philip Hitti Wa Madou’atih fi kitab Tarikh Al’Arab* (Philip Hitti and his objectivity in his History of the Arabs), (Damascus: Dar Alfikr Almou’asser, 1985).

<sup>61</sup> In the next chapter it shall be elaborated more on the social groups which Saadeh’s ideas had represented, whereby we could unveil the reasons for choosing such historical narratives as opposed to others.

Hartmann's research was not purely academic, since he did work as a diplomat for a period of time in his career. He had established "The German society for the Islamic sciences" (Fück, 1996: 295-296). His status attracted the attention of the French authorities. Hence, according to the archives of the French foreign ministry, he had visited *Assham* region briefly before the eruption of the First World War. He wrote several letters which he sent to the German "Frankfurt" newspaper. He later compiled them in a book entitled "The Diaries of a Journey in Syria" (Kawtharani, 1980: 325).

In his book Hartmann was clear that if the region was to be divided among European powers, then Germany should have its "share" (Kawtharani, 1980: 333). He also insinuated that there is a high level of theft in the Syrian city of *Hamah*, which needs a "European" leader and military garrison to restore security in this area (Kawtharani, 1980: 334). Hartmann even considered that the French intrusion in the area was "insolence" while Germany's efforts therein were to support "civilization" (Kawtharani, 1980: 326).

In an attempt to assist his government, Hartmann claimed that in order for German expeditions to succeed, they should not be religious missionaries (Kawtharani, 1980: 335-336). Also according to the Syrian writer, Mohammad Kurd Ali, who personally knew Hartmann, (Kawtharani, 1980, 335-336), the latter attempted to maintain that both Christianity and Islam are void. This is especially the case since they attempted to control the world and failed. Yet in his study of the Chinese Muslims he considered that it is more fruitful for this group to abandon Islam because it is the "enemy of civilization." Thus, it is more suitable for the Muslims in that region to adhere to "Western Civilization" (Kurd Ali, 1950, 33-34).

Accordingly, it is noted that Saadeh's national discourse lacks authenticity. It is a clear repetition of the abovementioned three writers' accounts of the history of both Islam and *Assham* region. Hence, Saadeh was imitating the western model of nationalism and relied on the accounts of western writers' ideas regarding the Near East. More importantly Saadeh's example clarifies the manner through which some Arab intellectual uncritically adopt western historical research regarding the region. It is a manifestation of the manner through which Arab intellectuals view themselves and the "other" by relying on western views rather than developing their own genuine research and ideas.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Who were Saadeh's Syrian Nationalists?**

#### **Greater Lebanon and its Complexities:**

The doubts that shrouded the creation of "Greater Lebanon" were definitely not exclusive to Saadeh's thoughts. In fact, most of the inhabitants of the new state were against its existence and opted for unity with the Syrian republic (Traboulsi, 2007: 75). This was manifested when the American King-Crane commission visited the Middle East region on June 1919, to investigate the sentiments of the inhabitants towards their political futures. Their findings illustrated that 80 percent opted for a "unified Syria" (Traboulsi, 2007:78).

Moreover when Saadeh arrived at the late 1920(s) in the region "Greater Lebanon's" borders were still in question. This was manifested in the early 1920(s), when some Christian voices, particularly some Lebanese notables and the Maronite Church were against the annexation of the southern Shiite parts of Jabal 'Amel and the south. They considered the aforesaid territories to form a challenge for the status of the Christian majority in Lebanon (Traboulsi, 2007:86-87). Furthermore, even when the country had its first constitution in 1926, it stipulated that the boundaries of Lebanon could be modified in the future (Traboulsi, 2007:89-90). Hence many people were not convinced of "Greater Lebanon." Moreover, this entity itself with its turbulent political status was not particularly convincing.

Accordingly, it was natural within the abovementioned circumstances, that Saadeh's ideas had strong ground. However, the objectors to the new entity were not unified. They were divided among certain factions. The Muslim Sunnis had Arab



nationalist affiliations, while another group opted for a federal unity with Syria. It was mainly composed of the Melchites (Greek Catholics and Greek Orthodox) subscribers (Traboulsi, 2007: 82).

**French Colonial Economy:**

On the economic level, the situation was not any better. The French Mandate had set barriers to the movement of goods and labor within *Assham* region. This resulted in economic difficulties for a significant number of the population within the region (Owen and Pamuk, 1999: 51). Also, the Mandate was keen on making every effort possible to monopolize trade within Syria and Lebanon (Owen and Pamuk, 1999: 51). Moreover, there was little effort made for spending on public works until 1934. The colonizing authorities had under the pressure of internal interest groups to increase such spending for building roads and widening the size of Beirut's port. Such efforts were made in order to increase its transit trade, and to establish the aforesaid city as a Mediterranean one (Owen and Pamuk, 1999: 65-66). Yet, according to some estimates, there is little reason to believe that the economic per capita income had increased during the period 1919-1939 (Owen and Pamuk, 1999: 66).

Another peculiar aspect of the French Mandate was that the French were in control of the state apparatus. This caused further animosity particularly with the Lebanese Maronite Patriarch Antoine 'Arida, and many more Lebanese from different sectors of the society (Traboulsi, 2007: 96-97). Also, the French policy of "divide and rule" was apparent, as it had replaced the Sunni and Greek orthodox state functionaries by their middle class Maronite counterparts in Mount Lebanon (Traboulsi, 2007: 93). This was realized by Saadeh who claimed that once the Maronites controlled the economy and

state apparatus, they became completely malleable in the hands of the French authorities (Saadeh, 2004: 61). This provided him with more support of religious groups that were excluded for the benefit of the Maronites such as the Greek Orthodox to whom he belonged. This was the case since, as mentioned earlier, he was unable to seriously penetrate the Sunni Muslims with his party and ideas.

Furthermore, the French authorities had divided today's Syria and Lebanon into five statelets, namely Greater Lebanon, Aleppo, Damascus, and an Alawite independent area which were later followed by a Druze one. Yet, a striking paradox rises therein as the French authorities considered these areas as one single economic unit (Traboullis, 2007: 91).

Such grievances, which the Mandate had caused, were mercilessly criticized by Saadeh. He considered that geography determines economic factors (Saadeh, 2004: 34). He clearly called upon the Lebanese government for the forestation of Lebanon. Such measurement would enable the "Syrians" to function better because it provides them with a substantial level of air humidity and a convenient climate (Saadeh, 2004: 74). He also advocated economic interdependence between the different regions of "Syria," (Saadeh, 2004, 80) instead of leaving the region monopolized by the French companies (Saadeh, 2004: 47).

### **Geography and Economics:**

In Saadeh's ideology the geographic factor was a proof of the unity of interests between the different parts of the "Syrian Nation." He introduced two solutions to this problem. First, as mentioned earlier, is to encourage the internal trade within the region. Second, he clearly considered that both capitalism and communism are failures, and

clearly said “we are not advocates of trade union wars or the war between social classes because we advocate a social nationalist unity” (Saadeh, 2004: 233) Yet, he blamed capitalism for the dissemination of the idea of the individual and individualism, whilst he claimed that the “national” economy should be designed to serve the “national” interest rather than the individual one (Saadeh, 2004: 168).

Saadeh maintained that only the rich citizens in Lebanon were able to dominate the seats in the main legislative and executive bodies, namely the parliament and the government (Saadeh, 2004: 67-68). He expressed his disbelief in confiscating the wealthy’s money. Instead he argued that the state should direct the rich into investing for the “national” benefit. Saadeh clearly considered that individual wealth and interest can be reconciled with the “Syrian nation’s” benefit (Saadeh, 2004: 171). Hence, he illustrated an idealistic view of the bourgeoisie and the manner through which they utilized their capital, especially in the third world. This is the case as the aforesaid class was created to be in direct interest with foreign rule and powers and could not escape the grip of the Western Metropole’s economic grip.<sup>62</sup>

Saadeh clearly did not believe in the “warfare” of trade unions and assumed that the wealthy in “Syria” could raise capital to benefit the whole “nation.” One is faced with a special type of eclecticism. Saadeh assumed that “Syria” was one uniform “organic” body, in which its “sons” can reach a compromise over material interests. Yet, as mentioned earlier, that by denouncing class struggle, he was simply attempting to gather

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<sup>62</sup> For further details on the weakness of the Arab Bourgeoisie and its connection with the western Metropol note : Samir Amin, *Al'Umma Al'Arabiyah* (The Arab Nation), translated from the French into Arabic, Kamil Quaiser Dagher, (Beirut: Dar Ibn Rushd, 1978). Amin divided the world into Metropolis and Satellites, explaining that in the colonial era, the upper Arab classes were the mediator for the Metropolises’ benefits, who wanted to receive from the colonial states their raw materials at a cheap price while selling their products in these same satellites at a high price, hence absorbing any surplus which the colonized states acquire via their economic activity.

two classes, i.e. the workers, and the capitalists who were simply at immense variance in their interests and future outlooks.

Saadeh also made his ideas more attractive to the Arab masses in the Near East by focusing on French colonialism. He rightly claimed, in order for "Syria" to maintain its wealth, it should first acquire its political independence. Saadeh considered such a step to be the first milestone towards reforming "Syria's" socio-economic problems and misfortunes (Saadeh, 2004: 152). However, upon his return from his last migration in 1947 he was stunned to see how the Lebanese bourgeoisie still maintained their connections with the western companies. He expressed his rejection of such activities to prevent the "warfare" among classes (Saadeh, 2004: 173-175). He still insisted on private ownership of the means of production and perceived that such adherence of the Lebanese upper class can be resolved via strong argument (Saadeh, 2004: 195), under the control of the state as he insinuated (Saadeh, 2004: 172-173).

Saadeh also called for the abolishment of "feudalism" within Lebanon. He considered such a situation to have enslaved many peasants. Accordingly, he believed that in order to avoid any future economic misfortunes or crises, the economy should be based on the productivity of the inhabitants of "Syria." Saadeh believed this is the solution for the distribution of wealth among both the workers and the owners of the means of production. This principle, in his opinion, puts limits on the wealthy's "individualistic" behavior and integrates him within the general economic process of the "nation." (Saadeh, n.d.: 58-60).

Such solutions for the "Syrian Nation's" economic problems are typical of what Mohammad Jaber AlAnsary labeled as the compromising "Arab attitude of mind." In

such a case instead of finding radical solutions to certain problems and interests, those are blended together in an eclectic manner. This avoids taking radical stances on social issues, but rather finds midways which evade any fundamental change in the state of affairs. In Saadeh's case herein, the conflict between the rich and the poor, he attempted to "reconcile" these differences in order to keep the society intact.

Saadeh, also, attempted to refute Marx's thesis on class struggle. He considered that Marx's "philosophy" suffers from serious handicaps. He claimed that it lacks a criterion for people's needs and work and how to control them. He rejected the idea that labor is the standard for the determination of prices and wages. He believed that in each state it is an internal issue, hence implying that the needs and wages of the people are controlled by the state or another political entity (Saadeh, 2004: 212). However, Saadeh seems to not realize that Marx asserted that people's needs are always increasing as society elevates itself and becomes more complex. Hence labor becomes the most important factor and variable since it acts as a mathematical mean between the fluctuations of the prices of commodities. Therefore one could say that Saadeh assumed that the state can act as an independent entity which can regulate the interests of the different classes. Such an assumption was contested by the historical studies of both Marx and Friedrich Engels.<sup>63</sup>

Another chord which Saadeh struck with his audience is his discontent with the rising number of immigrants, and their situation, which had a significant number of Christian Syro-Lebanese individuals among them. He rightly attributed this issue to the greed of

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<sup>63</sup> For a classical refutation of the statement that the state was an eternal and just "judge" among different classes within a society Friedrich Engels, *The origin of the family, private property, and the state, in the light of the researches of Lewis H. Morgan*, with an introduction by Eleanor Burke Leacock, (New York: International publishers, 1972). For an update of Engels ideas based on modern historical findings note: Chris Herman, "Engels and the origins of human society", *International Socialism* 2:65, Winter 1994.

the internal “capitalists,” and the economic hardships that in turn led them to abandon their homeland and seek better living opportunities elsewhere. Consequently he expressed his delight for their return. However, he was keen to mention that under the French Mandate and the control of foreign capital, their return and capability to invest in their country (i.e. Syria and Lebanon) would be fruitless. His solution to this pending issue is as asserted previously, is to unite both Syria and Lebanon and adopt “national” economic policies that would encourage local enterprises and economic interdependence between the different parts of “Syria” (Saadeh, 2004: 57-59).

Saadeh was aware of how some “Syrian” rich migrants preferred to conduct their trade with “foreign” entities, and peoples in their migrant countries rather than conducting such transactions with their fellow “Syrians.” Such an issue is a reminder of his abovementioned “idealistic” view of capital and capitalists (Saadeh, 2004: 165-166). Yet, upon his return to Lebanon, he was keen on his first speech to mention that the state should “resist” migration via implementing suitable “national” economic measures. He suggested this will put an end to this phenomenon (Saadeh, 2004: 57-59). Furthermore, he asserted that the “Syrians” cannot function properly in an “arid” region such as Sudan, since “its nature does not suit the Syrian temperament” (Saadeh, 2004: 18-19). Also, Saadeh thought that in encouraging the “Syrian” immigrants to return to their homeland, such measure would limit the Jewish migration to Palestine (Saadeh, 2004: 58).

Considering Saadeh’s anti French colonialism, anti Jewishness, anti Arabism, anti feudalism in addition to his support for peasants, return of immigrants (among which were many Christians), separation of religion from the state, and so forth, hence it is noted that he was supported by ethnic and religious minorities within the region such

non-Maronite Christians, Alwaites , and some Druzes along with other minority groups of all types (Seale, 1966: 71). Such groups were afraid of Arab Nationalism as being a Muslim Sunni control in disguise. Therefore, Saadeh's ideas were rather tempting for those minorities as it would spare them any such hegemony. As a result, the urban Greek Orthodox state functionary who was replaced by a Maronite mountaineer (as mentioned previously), the Alwaites and Druzes who were considered under the Ottoman Sunni rule as "heretics" and were attached to land as their source of income,<sup>64</sup> and the Kurd who would be considered a minority member in an Arab nationalist state, all could find something that represents them in Saadeh's "blood and soil" national doctrine.

It would be accurate to realize that Saadeh's national ideas were "an embodiment of the explicit rejection the Arab character of the state and the nation in the name of a national project which aims at replacing it with an identity, the Syrian identity, as a revival of the minority groups" (Chabry and Chabry, 1991: 213). More strikingly, Saadeh himself was not oblivious to this fact, and addressed positively these minorities. He maintained that minorities, namely the Christians, Druzes, Alawites and Shiites suffered from the persecution of the greatest "Mohammadan" sect in the region, i.e. the Sunnis. Hence reasserting his target audience and being completely conscious of which groups that will most correspond to his "Syrian Nationalism."<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> For the attachment of Peasants to their clan and the land at the same time in the Arab Middle East, see above p.87 and passim

<sup>65</sup> Antoun Saadeh, *AllIslam fi resalatieh: Almasehyyah wa Almohamdyyah* (Beirut: 1956) 236 cited in Mohammad Jaber AlAnsary, *Al Fikr Al'Arabi WaSera' Al Addad*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Beirut: Almo'ssasah Al 'Arabiah Lidirasat Wa Alnasher, 1999) 463

### **Inventing Traditions as Means to Attract Partisans:**

However a pending question remains as to how Saadeh was able to recruit his partisans, which sheds some light over how identities are created in the Arab Middle East. Saadeh apparently used two methods to disseminate his ideas. First, like other national movements, according to Benedict Anderson's historical study, he relied heavily on printed press. This was manifested in the several newspapers which he had issued in Lebanon and abroad such as "*AlZawba'ah*", "*AlNitham AlJadeed*", "*Suriyah Aljadeedah*" and so forth. This channel was extremely vital for Saadeh's propaganda to reach as many people as possible within his party and elsewhere. The Second method, which Saadeh utilized, was by creating certain symbols for his party members. Through such invented traditions, the partisans would feel a sense of belonging and unity within the realm of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party. Such symbols included party claims in which for example a head of a certain group within the party would ask its members "What do you live for?" the group would answer "for Syria", he would in turn ask "who is our leader?" they would reply "Alza'im"<sup>66</sup>. Finally, the leader would ask "Who is the Za'im?", and they would reply "Saadeh."<sup>67</sup>

As clarified previously by Eric Hobsbawm, such activity, along with taking a red Cyclone in the middle of the party's white and black flag as a symbol would have an enormous effect on the partisans. It offers them a sense of belonging to a larger entity and

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<sup>66</sup> Literally speaking the word "*Zai'm*" would mean a leader but in such context it tends to mean more, as something similar to the "*Fuehrer*" or "*Il Duce*."

<sup>67</sup> For a vivid illustration of such party festivals note: Gubran Jreij, *Ma' Antoun Saadeh: Min 8 February 1932 ila 8 Tamouz 1949*(With Antoun Saadeh From 8 February 1932 Until 8 July 1949), (N.P.: The Author, 1971?) p.55



a sense of a purpose and a cause to live and die for in addition to the embodiment of the "nation" and its "sons."

Such para-military traditions which manifested the party's slogans: "Freedom, Duty, Discipline and Power," attracted the youth of such minorities. They found in the organization of the party a great deal of discipline and a source of strength. This would enable them to be forceful in facing the Arab Sunni majority.<sup>68</sup> Hence, the party's organizational credentials were the magnetic forces which attracted Saadeh's partisans, according to one observer, rather than political or historical arguments (Seale, 1966: 69).

One should note that the party's propaganda via its printed press (i.e. brochures, statements, and more importantly newspapers) played a decisive role in strengthening and widening the party's base. This was clear as more middle class literate minority groups emerged. Therefore, the party's invented ideological, organizational and physical "traditions" played a significant part in gaining partisans. Saadeh's party had provided them with seemingly strong arguments against the Arab Muslim Sunni majority within the region. It fueled them with a sense of dignity as not to consider themselves historical mistakes due to the fact that they belonged to minority groups.

#### **Saadeh's Legacy:**

Saadeh's ideas were not confined to his party. In fact, more recently, it had its subscribers attempting to implement Saadeh's thought into different fields of study, such as Husny Haddad's book "The Syrian Music." Also, Adel Daher utilized Saadeh's seemingly secular principles, as a method for refuting the Islamic fundamentalist's

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<sup>68</sup> It is worth mentioning that the Arab Sunnis constituted 50% of the inhabitants of *Assham* region in 1983, note: Daniel Pipes, *Greater Syria: A History of an Ambition*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.19

arguments (Daher, 2002). Daher even attempted to deduce a social philosophy from Saadeh's writings (Daher, 2007).

In the realm of history, there were several attempts to rewrite history in accordance with Saadeh's "Syrian Nation." This was conducted by researchers such as Wadee' Bashur (Bashur, 1989) and Bashar Khaleef (Khaleef, 2003). Hence clarifying that Saadeh's ideology was and remains to be a source of inspiration for the Arab Middle East's culture, history and philosophy. So it is evident that Saadeh's ideology did not fade away.

Curiously enough, one finds that some of the sympathizers of Saadeh's ideology are also from the eastern Christian clergy. This is apparent in Dr. Michel Assabe'i work who is actually a member of the Greek Catholic clergy. He wrote a two volume book, in which he defended Saadeh's ideas and concept of the "Fertile Crescent." He also attempted through this book to defend Saadeh's ideology against accurate accusations such as that "Greater Syria" corresponds with the territory that falls under the religious control of the "Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch and all East."

Assabe'i attempted to clarify that the existence of minorities in the region reveals its uniqueness and unity. This is the case since both the Greek orthodox and the Greek Catholics are scattered within the "Fertile Crescent." He even attempted to apply Saadeh's geographic interpretations in order to explain the temperament of the people within the region. He considered the Maronites and Kurds as being too hasty because they are Mountaineers. Thus, they win and lose fast in the political arena. On the other hand he assumed that Sunnis and Alwaites are patient political actors and slow in attempting to rule of their states via their calculated policies. This is a result of their

geographic locations as inhabitants of the coasts in the Arab Middle East (Assabe'I, 1999: 49).

An earlier account by a Greek Orthodox member of the clergy, was the introduction written by Espero Jabbour, to a new addition of George Mara'i Haddad's research entitled "The Arab Conquest of *Assham*." He introduced a narrative regarding the pre-Islamic situation in the region and used the word "Syrians" to describe the inhabitants of the region. He labeled them with certain traits such as being always divided, while considering the Egyptians to stand always behind their Pharaohs before the Islamic conquests. This indicates that he believed that both the "Syrians" and the "Pharaonic Egyptians" each to have their eternal traits that are different from each other.<sup>69</sup>

The contemporary Syrian republic ruled by the Arab nationalist *Baa'th* party had been viewing Saadeh's ideology as a milestone towards achieving the ultimate goal of Arab unity. Thus, its members encouraged Saadeh's thought in order to legitimize their rule, via attempting to unite the "Fertile Crescent" first before uniting the whole of the Arab World. This is especially the case after the fall of Syria under the leadership of the Syrian Alawite minority therein.<sup>70</sup>

In a recent book which was composed of interviews with Arab and western historians conducted by the author, Bashar Khaleef, a significant number of the Arab historians considered the "Fertile Crescent" to be one historical unit with one culture. This was the

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<sup>69</sup> Espiro Jabbour. Introduction. in George Mar'i Haddad, *Fath Al'Arab li Assham* (The Arab Conquest of *Assham*), (Tripoli, Lebanon: AlManshoorat Aljame'ah, 1984,) pp. 5-9

<sup>70</sup> For the mutual rapprochement between the *Baa'th* and Saadeh's party after the former had ruled the Arab Syrian republic and the incorporation of the idea of the "fertile crescent," note: Laurent and Annie Charby, *siysah wa aqlyat fi AlShareq Al Adna* (Politics and Minorities in the Near East), p.219 and passim.

case without them being necessarily “Syrian Nationalists” or adherers of Saadeh’s party (Khaleef, 2008).

Saadeh’s party is not in the strongest position possible. Yet, his idea of the “Fertile Crescent” is still in existence nowadays, especially, when dealing with the aforesaid region’s past. This term was used by authors who had little to do with his party or his ideology.

## **Conclusion:**

The idea of Syrian nationalism is of a distinguished characteristic. It reflects the aspirations of certain segments of minority groups, who were attempting to carve their way during the colonial era and beyond. Accordingly, "Syrian nationalism" is one of these aspirations. Undoubtedly, it is created as a result of the Arab inhabitants' encounter with the western civilization. It is a manifestation of the hybrid modern "Arab thought" which is a combination of a peculiar mixture of sectarian affiliations, western nationalistic thought and archeological history. Hence, it is a national project which proved politically unviable, whereas "Syrian nationalism" achieved a relatively successful ideological status among several intellectuals and historians within the Near East.

On reviewing Benedict Anderson's model of colonial nationalism, it is concluded that "Syrian nationalism" is compatible with the concept of "Formal nationalism." It is a nationalist doctrine which is embodied in the Syrian nationalist main ideologue, Antoun Saadeh's political party, The Syrian Social Nationalist Party. In this case the national ideas of Saadeh are articulated in party propaganda, by utilizing brochures and newspapers to spread their ideas. The fact that Saadeh's party is described as "state within a state," i.e. it encompasses all of the functions of the state makes his political organization to be a channel through which he was able to disseminate his ideas. Yet, his ideology was a peculiar form of "formal nationalism." It included attempting to reach, via the party, political power. This would have enabled Saadeh's Syrian national ideas and ideals to be politically implemented and imposed, from above (i.e. by his party if it reached political power), on the inhabitants of the "Fertile Crescent" region. It aspired to

provide them with a unique "Syrian" identity that includes a political program which eliminates any other socio-political affiliation, such as adhering to both Arabism and Islam that were considered by Saadeh as synonymous identitarian entities. However, the Syrian Social Nationalist party remains to be a politically weak since it failed to achieve its ultimate goal of reaching political power in any of the regions that form the "Syrian nation."

Syrian nationalism was also part of what Benedict Anderson considered to be a colonial "Map," i.e. the subscription of colonial nationalists to a homeland which was specified by the colonialist powers. In this case, Saadeh is an adherent to what the French colonialists thought to be "geographic Syria," which includes current Lebanon, Syrian Arab republic, Jordan, Israel, the West Bank and northern Iraq. Furthermore, even when he added new geographical territories to the aforesaid region namely Cyprus, middle and lower Iraq and Kuwait, he is following the term coined by the American Egyptologist, James Henry Breasted. Accordingly, Saadeh remains to continue being a nationalist thinker that claimed to be authentic. In fact, he is a protégé of the western colonialist imagination of the Fertile Crescent or "Greater Syria."

Saadeh's national views are not atypical as the wave of nationalism was reaching the Arab Middle East in the 1930(s). He relied on geography and racial fusion as his primary foundations of his nationalism. It was a reaction conducted on his behalf to the region which seemed to be torn under confessional and ethnic rivalries, especially when those took an extremely acute manifestation in Lebanon. Such ideas which constituted long outdated scientific research in the western states were attractive to Saadeh, as a mean to achieve four goals. First, through geography he was able to find a common denominator

in order to unite such groups in one unit, and concurrently distance them from other adjacent Arab countries.

Second, concentration on the “racial” fusion, he was able to reiterate the claims by different groups such as the claim that Maronites are Phoenicians, and others are Arabs. Hence trying to act pragmatically when faced with such fractured national sentiments within Lebanon in particular.

Third, he was adopting “blood and soil” national theory, clearly aiming at attracting different ethnic and religious minorities within the region, against the Arab Muslim majority which he considered to constitute the largest threat towards such minor groups. Hence, by encouraging the minorities to join hands, Saadeh would be able to force the aforesaid majority to join the minority groups’ identity rather than opposite direction.

Fourth, Saadeh was keen on exaggerating “Syria’s” racial fusion and land, to encourage his followers to join the west. He considered the “Syrians” as racially Mediterranean and geographically distant from Asia and its Arabs, deserts, backwardness and “barbarism.”

In order to achieve the abovementioned four goals, Saadeh had to “rewrite” and “reinvent” the area’s past. A goal he attempted to achieve through three different interdependent ways. First he attempted to rewrite the region’s history, in order to exclude both Arabs and Islam using imperial sources, mainly the writings of the Jesuit Orientalist Henri Lammens and the early writings of the Lebanese historian Philip Hitti. He ignored other sources which provided the region with more accurate accounts regarding the nature and the expansion of the Arabs before and after the rise of Islam. He considered the aforesaid entities as a mere religious propaganda and a pathway for Sunni

Arab Muslims to subdue other religious and ethnic groups, because he believed it was the case during the reign of the Ottoman Empire.

Also Saadeh did not positively credit anything "eastern". Hence, he was unable to accept the fact that there were sedentary Arabs and advanced ones. He was very aggressive towards them. He viewed them as bedouins and "savage" people. This reveals the extent that how some Orientalist ideas prevailed in his mind. This made him subject to the same colonizing powers he was resisting, namely the French.

Second Saadeh attempted to "revive" and "invent" "Syria" through consciously depending on the printed press, particularly newspapers. He envisioned them as the best channel through which he can disseminate his ideas. This was only a typical step used consciously in order to spread nationalistic ideas, as Benedict Anderson had unveiled, whether from North America's Creoles reaching the imperial Crown in the United Kingdom.

Third Saadeh was careful to use certain "invented traditions", in Eric Hobsbawm's language. He was keen on recruiting his partisans in para-military activities, such as partisan gatherings. These included salutes and actions that personified his concept of strength, power and discipline. In these ceremonies, the partisans confirm that the reason for their lives was "Syria" under the leadership of their "*Za'im*" Saadeh. Such disciplines, that are similar to Fascist and Nazi party activities in the 1930 (s), were ways and means to strengthen his partisans belief in their "Syrian Nation." It was a way through which his minority subscribers could strengthen their position in the face of the Arab Muslim majority.



Saadeh was a writer who relied heavily on propaganda, hence the assertion of his ideas or attempts to "rewrite" history, in which he concentrated on the history of the Fertile Crescent region from antiquity, where he elaborated the pre-Arab past within this territory. He was extremely keen on asserting the "Syrian" identity by eliminating both Arab history and existence in the region. This was manifested in his claim that Arabs do not constitute any part of the "Syrian" racial fusion. He clearly illustrated a high level of both Arabophobia and Islamophobia. This is not atypical of at least some of the youth in Mount Lebanon.

Despite Saadeh's seemingly secular reform principles such as preventing the clergy or the Muslim sheikhs to indulge into the affairs of the state, did not consider his ideas as mere secular "scientific" ones. It is apparent from his writings that he considered that his ideology to constitute one vision "on life, the universe, and art." He wrote explicitly at several intervals that his doctrines are of a religious nature. His ideas did not surpass considering Islam with its practices and jurisprudence as alien to Syria, while considering Christianity as a "Syrian" religion revealed by a "Syrian", i.e. Jesus Christ. Saadeh's religion did not exceed the assertion that it unites materialism with spiritualism (*Madradiyah* in his terminology), thus leaving great ambiguity regarding this issue.

Saadeh's political ideology had strong correlations with the developments that took place in the disturbed Near East. Hence, as mentioned earlier, his change of the "Syrian homeland" form including exclusively Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan and northern Iraq, into encompassing Cyprus, Kuwait and the rest of Iraq, were not "innocent" ideas based on more thorough "scientific" research as he claimed. In fact, this change in geographic territory which he regarded as "Syrian" was the result of his alliance with the

Hashemites, as one of his ex-partisans illustrated. Even his party at the earliest era, according to some sources, had received financial assistance from Fascist Italy. This reveals that Saadeh's party and ideology were associated with the international political rivalries among the western states.

On the socio-economic aspects, Saadeh, notwithstanding his adherence to the abolishment of feudalism, was completely compromising in his economic vision. He did not aspire to abolish private property of the means production but rather to control it via the party, or the "Syrian" state which he dreamed of. He illustrated severe hostility towards trade unions and explicitly mentioned that he viewed his society as an "organic" body in which there is no place for class struggle.

It is worth contemplating on how another fellow Greek Orthodox, the urban Damascene Michel 'Aflaq the establisher of the Baa'th party, who evaluated Saadeh's ideas, when he said: " The Whole movement [Syrian Nationalism] was an old mixture of modernism, of scientism, with something extremely old, even archeological; with the resurrection of the local past and grudges a thousand years old. Among the many movements of Arab rebirth, this was one which aborted and lost itself in an unhealthy romanticism, due perhaps, to the fact that Saadeh's mind was directed towards the past. It was also an extreme right-wing movement preaching a sinister philosophy of order, a synthesis of the interests of the employers and the employees, deliberately playing down the rights of the working class under the pretext that to acknowledge them would lead to anarchy."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> An interview in Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria: A Study of Post War Arab Politics 1945-1958*, (London, Oxford University Press), 1966, p. 68

Paradoxically, Aflaq's abovementioned statement runs in contrast to what the current Syrian *Baa'th* regime. The latter is concurrently, in principle, in agreement with Saadeh's thoughts, particularly his vision to the "Map." For the *Baa'th*, this will be a step towards achieving the vision of pan-Arab nationalism. This is clear from the stances of the *Baa'th* and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party during the last decades in Lebanon.<sup>72</sup> Hence, Saadeh's political success may have been meager, however, his ideology is still persistent and remains to be a source of inspiration for some contemporary Arab thinkers.

In conclusion Saadeh's legacy lies in the fact that it is an early manifestation of minority group's aspirations. It is noted that with the rise of narrower ethnic political ambitions, such as North Africa's Berbers and Iraq's Kurds, constitutes a departure from attempts to incorporate the Arab Muslim majority in any national project. This proves that Syrian nationalism is a far fetched dream in the political arena. On the other hand, it remains to be an elitist ideology that has the potential of gaining momentum in the future. The revival of the idea of the "Fertile Crescent's" unity highly depends on the demise of other political ideologies, namely Islamic fundamentalism and Arab nationalism. The prospects of such an event do not seem promising, since the Syrian Nationalist Party is politically weak. Thus, the dream of one unified "Greater Syrian" nation is one political project out of several others in the Arab Middle East, that only time will reveal its fate.

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<sup>72</sup> For further details on the relationship between both parties, note: Daniel Pipes, *Greater Syria: The History of an Ambition*, (New York, N.Y. : Oxford University Press, 1990), Chapter 4.

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