



THE *UMMAH* (NATION) IN ARAB NATIONALIST DISCOURSE

A CRITIQUE OF SATI' AL HUSRI'S THESES

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During the second and third decades of the twentieth century the concept of Arab nationalism was transformed from an emotional idea that ignited the feelings of those who were fed up with the Ottomans, particularly their “Turkification” policies, to a political ideology embraced by an elite who saw the notion of *‘Urooba* (Arabdom) as an ideal tool for mobilising a public bitterly resentful of the policies of the colonial powers in the Arab countries. This tool, in their view, would also provide a vision of the future that could unify an *Ummah* (Nation) torn apart by divisions and occupation.

Two major events that occurred in the second half of the second decade, when the First World War was at its height, awakened the Arab consciousness and the wider Arab public to the downside of separating the Arab Nation from the Ottoman Empire. As a background to this, the Ottoman Empire, which had been undergoing a revival since the latter period of Sultan Abdul Hamid II’s

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reign, had been still further invigorated after the “Union and Progress Party” came to power in Turkey and the Empire’s Turanianism and “Turkification” policies went into decline.

The first of those two events was the failure of what was known as the “Arab Revolution” in its endeavours to create an Arab national entity. The second was the Sykes-Picot Agreement (under which the Arab East was divided between Britain and France) and Britain’s Balfour Declaration, which granted the Jews a “National Home” in Palestine.

Even so, the idea of *‘Urooba* still appeared to be the most effective way of mobilising the public. From the 1920s it was no longer seen – as had been the case in the past – as giving the Arabs a separate identity independent of the Ottoman Turks and their pan-Islamic pretensions; rather, it came to be regarded as an expression of a national character and of a nation that had suffered destruction and disintegration at the hands of imperialism.

The transition from *‘Urooba* versus Turkification to *‘Urooba* versus imperialist-driven fragmentation was more than just the normal kind of transition one might encounter when moving on from one historical period to another, since its consequences appeared to benefit the “*‘Urooba*-devotees” and nationalists at several different levels. As well as freeing them from any lingering sense of unease about the position of *‘Urooba* vis-à-vis Islam (i.e. the Ottoman Pan-Islamic League), it imbued their cause with a distinct political flavour and transformed it from being a demand for national secession to a movement for national unity. This meant that, instead of being seen (thanks to Turkish propaganda) as separatists, nationalists came to be regarded as a unifying force. And despite the fact that the price paid for the transition that improved their image was enormous (i.e. fragmentation), without it the concept of *‘Urooba* would never have been able to spread and attract mass public support.

One thing that may have helped infuse nationalism and *‘Urooba* with a political ideology was the fact that a new era of political activism had begun in the Arab East following the First World War, the fragmentation of the region and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. It was no mere



coincidence, therefore, that the four major Arab political ideologies should have emerged during that period (the 1920s):– patriotism (in the sense of attachment to one’s individual country), Arab nationalism, Islamism and Marxism; these appeared at slightly different times, though there were vast differences in the degree to which they were able to influence and mobilise.

It was also due to these factors that the era saw the first stirrings of the political movements and parties that were to become so representative of the period from the 1930s to the 1950s.

From Nejjib Azouri to the 1930s the nationalists produced reams of literature on ‘*Urooba*, the Arab Nation, the meaning of nationalism and related topics in an attempt to establish a vision. They had no links to any political movements, at least in the early years when they were beginning to write about these subjects. This was also true of Zaki al Arsouzi and Mohammed Ezzat Darouzah, who belonged to the second nationalist generation (i.e. the one immediately after Azouri’s) and who were influenced by European political thinking – in the form in which it reached them; however, their familiarity with it was limited; this was even true of Azouri – the one who had had most contact with European ideas.

Perhaps we can understand why they had such limited knowledge of the roots of nationalism at that time, or why there was no theoretical consistency in their writings, if we bear in mind that their main preoccupation was political rather than theory-related, and if we realise that the ideas they expressed on nationalism had a strong influence on the thinking of those who were involved in the battle of Arab political ideas; however, the fact that nationalist thought at that time lacked an overall theoretical vision¹ did not only have a damaging effect on the thought itself; it also had negative consequences for political action.

This could also – paradoxically – be a further explanation of why nationalist thought was ideology-dominated for such a long time, even among

1 This was not just a feature of Arab nationalist thought; it was also commonly found in all Arab political tendencies. See Abdullah al Arawi’s *Mafhum al Hurriyah*, Casablanca, Arab Cultural Centre on the state of liberal thought and Abdul Ilah Belqazeez on the state of Islamic thought, *Al Dawla fi’l Fikr al Islami’l Mu’aasir*, Beirut, Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 2nd Ed. 2004.



those who sought to develop their ideas on nationalism from viewpoints that were independent of the party-political nationalist institutions.

As a man of major intellectual stature, Zaki al Arsouzi was seriously influential in stripping the nationalist concept of its “philosophical musings” and raising it above the level of mere party-political discourse (even though he himself had party-political affiliations). A similar verdict would also apply to Mohammed Ezzat Darouzah – another intellectual with a wide knowledge of such fields as history, cultures and religion. Nor can anyone deny the intellectual depth of a man like Michel Aflaq, who was highly familiar with modern European political theories and ideas, as well as the theory and concept of nationalism. However, whatever their contributions may have been, none of these men succeeded in establishing a theoretical foundation for the Arab nationalist construct.

At this point we must correct the suggestion that the main reason why there are differences between a nationalist vision and a theory of nationalism may be due to the fact that Michel Aflaq’s nationalist vision was more consistent and coherent than the others’. By “vision” here we mean a general view of the meaning of nationalism and the way in which politics and culture can be the tools used in order to achieve it. Conversely, however, the vision is also shaped by the demands of politics, which take precedence over intangibles such as logical consistency or harmony – just as practical effectiveness enjoys a higher status than ideas.

Theory, on the other hand, is quite different. It approaches the subject methodically and aims to understand it objectively, and its content and substance consists of the “product of thought” and the realities of history. It seeks to examine the laws that govern social phenomena, and nationalism is one of those phenomena. If we understand it in this sense, we should recognize that the writings of the people we have referred to above did not succeed in coming up with a theory of nationalism, despite the fact that many of them (Aflaq, for example) provided the raw material for the “theoretical construct” of the subject.

When we say “a theory of nationalism”, we do not mean the question of nationalism in absolute terms; i.e. we do not expect our intellectuals to



produce a general theory that applies to the phenomenon of nationalism around the world. Such a theory would be impossible in view of the wide range of experiences in establishing national unity – which means that there are “theories of nationalism” rather than a single theory. What our intellectuals have been expected to do – and what they have failed to do, for a number of reasons – is to produce a theory of *Arab* nationalism based on, and inspired by, the available body of modern political thought, as well as historical reality and the present-day Arab situation.

2 – Al Husri and theory

Anyone who peruses Sati’ al Husri’s many books and papers will recognize the richness of his thought and the encyclopaedic nature of his knowledge, in which he moves freely between the different schools of modern European political thought – liberal, nationalist and socialist – as well as political and social ideas, philosophy, education and history. He borrows the ideas of Rousseau, Herder, Schilling and Fichte, discusses Ernest Renan and Stalin and examines the roles of economic and religious factors in shaping nations, with impeccable logic and supported by a dazzling array of facts. He reviews the theories of nation and nationalism in Europe, presents the facts about them to his reader and discusses and refutes some of them (French and English). He supports the German theories and makes an exhaustive examination of nationalist unification experiences throughout the nineteenth century – or rather, from the time of the American union in the second half of the eighteenth century – and produces a brilliant analysis of the unification experiences of modern nations rarely found among either his contemporaries or present-day Arab nationalist intellectuals.

From his birth in Sana’a in 1879 to his death in Baghdad in 1968 he spent the greater part of his life defending Arab nationalist thought. As the years went by, his writing matured and he produced his best work between the age of sixty and a few years before his death – i.e. between the early 1940s and the first half of the 1960s. He never slowed down. He occupied several positions in the Ottoman state, and he was a minister in Syria (his country of origin) and Iraq and an adviser to the Arab League’s Cultural



Committee. However, being close to the centres of power never changed his opinions about the things he believed in, which he continued to defend until he died. In this respect he was a committed intellectual; however, his discourse was less vehement than that of other nationalist intellectuals of his generation; in fact almost the only writer to rival him in sobriety of style was Qustantin Zareeq. At the same time, though, he was a stubborn and vocal opponent of any believer in the then current notions of “local patriotism” (in the sense of attachment to a specific country)¹ who rejected or attacked Arab nationalism or accused it of idealism. Even so, he was equally tough on nationalist intellectuals who shared his belief in the cause but whose theses he disagreed with, and he debated with them with a passion tempered with well-reasoned argument². However, he did not adopt this approach with those nationalist or political parties³ that failed to assign ‘Urooba or nationalism a proper place in their constitutions or political programmes⁴.

He was always a strong critic of the nationalist thinkers for their intellectual shortcomings – shortcomings they passed on to their political parties - which he attributed to an injudicious relationship on their part with the sources of modern Western thought. When Arab intellectuals became receptive to modern Western thought – due to imperialist cultural domination – they became enthusiastic followers of the French and British

1 See examples of these debates in his reply to Ahmed Lutfi al Sayyid in Abu Khaldoun Sati’ al Husri: *Ara wa Ahaadith fi’l Qawmiyyah al ‘Arabiyyah*, in *Al A’maal al Qawmiyyah li Sati’ al Husri*, Beirut, Centre for Arab Unity Studies, Part 2, 2nd Ed. 1990, Pp. 74-78, his reply to Sa’ad Zaghloul: *Al ‘Urooba Awwalan* in *Al A’maal al Qawmiyyah li Sati’ al Husri*, Part 2, Pp. 47-51, his reply to Mustafa Amin (ibid. Pp. 104-112) and his reply to Taha Hussain; *Abhaath Mukhtaarah fi’l Qawmiyyah al ‘Arabiyyah* in *Al A’maal al Qawmiyyah li Sati’ al Husri*, Part 3, Pp. 167-179.

2 Examples of these debates: his reply to a talk by Salah al Din al Bitar, one of the Ba’ath Party leaders, in al Husri: *Al Iqlimiyyah – Judhoorua wa Budhoorua* in *Al A’maal al Qawmiyyah li Sati’ al Husri* Part 3, Pp. 73-78, and his sharp criticism of Michel Aflaq (ibid. Pp. 151-189).

3 Like his criticism of the Ba’ath Party (ibid. Pp. 193-203).

4 See his book *Al ‘Urooba baina Du’aatih wa Mu’aaridhiha* in *Al A’maal al Qawmiyyah li Sati’ al Husri*, Part 1, Pp. 59-132, where he criticises the Syrian Social Nationalist Party and the theses of its leader, Antun Saadeh, as well as the Syrian parties (National Party, People’s Party, Co-operative Socialist Party, Arab Ba’ath Party and Arab Socialist Party) and the Lebanese parties (National Socialist Front, Lebanese National Bloc, National Call Party, Republican Unionist Party and Lebanese Falangist Party).



schools of thought and embraced their political theories while ignoring the fact that the French and the British “did not look favourably upon the nationalist movements, for reasons related to their own interests and political ambitions”. In brief, those powers wanted to expand their own spheres of influence and their expansionist desires clashed with the rising nationalist movements in Europe¹; this meant that their attitude to nationalism was either negative (like the attitude of the non-nationalist intellectuals) or obscure, incoherent and inconsistent (as was the case with the nationalists).

As far as al Husri was concerned, he chose from the very start to identify more with the thinking of those societies that – like the Arabs – had suffered fragmentation such as Germany and Italy. This explains why he was strongly influenced by German nationalist thought, and it may also explain his preference for the theoretical approach, as well as the consistency of his theses.

Sati’ al Husri was strongly influenced by theory where the question of nationalism was concerned. He spent much of his time endeavouring to separate the notion of nationalism from “mystical discourse”² and political trivialities, as he sought to establish a methodical, coherent understanding of the subject based on modern nationalist thought and the experiences of modern history. However, he was never totally successful, because he tried to simplify nationalist theory to the point where it became no more than a theory on how a Nation is formed. The nation-state and the dynamics of national unity are almost absent from his writings. In fact, some of the things he had to say about the dialectics of the Nation and the State give the impression that a State is merely an offshoot, or fruit, of a Nation and that a Nation’s existence does not depend upon it any more than a tree’s existence depends upon whether or not it bears fruit.

Let us make a critical examination of this and other hypotheses in al Husri’s thought.

1 See details in al Husri’s *Abhaath Mukhtaarah fi’l Qawmiyyah al ‘Arabiyyah in Al A’maal al Qawmiyyah li Sati’ al Husri*, Part 3, Pp. 17-18.

2 This, in a nutshell, was his criticism of Michel Aflaq. See *Mu’tayaat al Hamish*, No. 4.



3 – On the formation of a Nation

Most of Sati' al Husri's writings deal with issues that recur again and again in various forms in his books and papers: "What is a Nation? What are the basic features that distinguish Nations from each other? What are the factors that make some human groups feel that they are a single Nation and then seek to strengthen themselves by forming their own state?"¹

It is clear that questions of this kind involve the person who asks them in two kinds of comparisons: theoretical and historical. The two comparisons may interpenetrate and overlap or they may exist separately, depending on the nature or level of the enquirer's thought or methodology. As far as Sati' al Husri is concerned they overlap and interpenetrate, because he applies his detailed knowledge of the political and national histories of Germany, Italy, Greece, Bulgaria, Switzerland, Belgium, the United States, Brazil and Argentine² to produce a reliable composite picture of the theories of modern political thought in Europe³. This in turn enables him to develop general theories about nationalism on the basis of historical experience.

So much for the approach and the vision that emerged from his combined roles as historian and political theorist. However, as far as the subject matter is concerned, the questions we cited above as being a recurring theme in al Husri's works all revolve almost exclusively round a single issue – the question of the *Ummah*, or Nation.

Is the Nation related to race, lineage or religion?

There are two reasons why it is legitimate for us to pose the question in these terms. Firstly, the concept of Nation – as many understand it – is synonymous with the notion of race and common ethnic origin. This idea was widespread during various stages of European history, most recently during the inter-War period, and it provided the inspiration for Nazism, racism, Zionism and calls for ethnic cleansing.

¹ Al Husri: *Maa Hiya'l Qawmiyyah?* In *Al A'maal al Qawmiyyah li Sati' al Husri*, Vol. 2, P. 29.

² See the following of his writings on the subject: i) *Muhaadharaat fi Nushu' il Fikrah 'l Qawmiyyah* ii) *Maa Hiya'l Qawmiyyah?* iii) *Hawla'l Qawmiyyah al 'Arabiyyah*.

³ See particularly his book *Maa Hiya'l Qawmiyyah?*



Secondly, Arabs in general see the concept of *Ummah* (i.e. Nation) as comprising the elements of both a national community and a religious community due – to some degree – to the historical connotations associated with the notion of the Islamic *Ummah*.

In al Husri's view this question is meaningless, not because it is an ideological cliché, but because it ignores the true elements that constitute a Nation. We shall examine his views on this issue, which he criticises with varying degrees of severity, ranging from his strong reaction to the hypothesis that a Nation has a single origin to his more urbane response to the proposition on the role of religion in forming a nation.

A – Formative factors

In al Husri's view no Nation in history has ever had a single origin or a pure blood line, since "all the Nations we know today were formed through the interpenetration of large numbers of different races and ethnic types throughout various stages of history"¹. The French Nation, for example, consists of sixty peoples², despite the fact that its unity as a political entity may suggest that it is descended from a single stock, and this is equally true of the other modern Nations in the world. On this basis – according to al Husri - Nations may be seen more as being like great rivers fed by numerous tributaries from various sources³. This means that the proposition of a Nation comprising a single race, blood line or origin is absurd. Such suppositions are "illusions that have taken control of people's intellects and brains and are not based on the slightest evidence or proof"⁴. The links that bind a nation are something different altogether and have nothing to do with origin or blood. An English intellectual, for example, would not wonder what racial origin or blood line links him to Shakespeare or Newton; nor would a French intellectual speculate about a similar type of link between himself and Racine or Voltaire. However, in both cases the names we have cited would be regarded as being their forebears.

¹ *Ara wa Ahaadith fi'l Wataniyyah wa'l 'Qawmiyyah*, P. 18.

² *Ibid.* P. 19.

³ *Ibid.* P. 19.

⁴ *Ibid.* P. 18.



And we Arabs are no exception to this rule. “We may not actually know if we are bound by ties of kinship to Sa’ad bin Abi Waqqas, for example, or Khalid bin al Walid, or Ibn al Haitham, or Abu’l ‘Ala al Ma’arri”¹, but we regard them as our forebears and ancestors.

However, although the notion of blood ties may be illusory, as Ibn Khaldoun maintains, “a belief in a single origin is an important psychological factor, even if it is at odds with reality. And a sense of kinship has a powerful psychological impact, even if no kinship actually exists”² because kinship in Nations is figurative, not physical³, since “the important thing about kinship and family ties is not just a blood link as such, but rather a belief in it and a belief that one’s origin comes from it”⁴.

However, in order to create a Nation a belief in kinship has not always been sufficient in itself unless it is accompanied by other relevant factors, as we shall see in al Husri’s writing. For example, this symbolic kinship might be a sort of spiritual – i.e. religious – relationship; and although religion – as al Husri repeatedly insists – is not one of the factors that go to make up a Nation, he concedes that it tends to have a unifying role⁵, even if this is not always the case. However, “religious ties alone are not enough to create a nationalism”⁶. This, in al Husri’s view, is particularly evident in the case of the world religions like Islam and Christianity, which transcend the bounds of nationalism and sometimes conflict with it, since they are international by nature⁷.

What are the basic factors in the formation of a Nation if they are not a single origin and religion – i.e. ties of blood and faith?

¹ Ibid. P. 20.

² *Muhaadharaat fi Nushu’ il Fikrah ‘l Qawmiyyah*, Pp. 20-21.

³ *Ara wa Ahaadith fi’l Wataniyyah wa’l ‘Qawmiyyah*, Pp. 20-21.

⁴ *Abhaath Mukhtaarah fi’l Qawmiyyah al ‘Arabiyyah* Part 3, P. 34.

⁵ *Ara wa Ahaadith fi’l Wataniyyah wa’l ‘Qawmiyyah*, P. 23.

⁶ Ibid. P. 28.

⁷ Ibid. P. 24.



In al Husri's view they are language and history¹; these are the only factors that distinguish one Nation from another, since it is the distinctive nature of individual languages that creates a Nation's unity and establishes the ties upon which its society is built². Language is "the life and soul of a Nation" and "the pivot and backbone of nationalism"³, while history is "a Nation's feeling and memory"⁴. Just as a Nation cannot exist unless its people share a common language, so too does it only lose its identity if it loses its language since, when this happens, it merges totally into the Nation that has imposed its language upon it⁵, in the same way that forgetting its history means losing its sense of identity⁶.

Sati' al Husri quotes, then criticises, the arguments against the idea of a link between language and religion⁷. In doing so, he makes no secret of the frame of reference he uses to support that link – that is to say, German nationalism. If we take a look at some of the leading proponents of German nationalism and their theses⁸, such as Herder and Fichte, we will see the extent to which he was inspired by their ideas – particularly on the fundamental role of language forming a Nation and establishing national unity on the German political model⁹.

A Nation, then, does not exist on the basis of a supposed single origin, nor of religion, but because it has a common language and history. However,

1 "The main factors leading to leading to the development of the sense of kinship, or closeness, felt by individuals in different Nations are language and history. A belief in a single common origin is primarily due to *a single language and a common history*". Ibid. P. 21. (My italics).

2 "Nations are distinguished from one anotherby their language; Nations' lives are based on their languages". Ibid. P. 21.

3 Ibid. P. 22.

4 Ibid. P. 22.

5 Ibid. P. 21.

6 Ibid. P. 23.

7 *Maa Hiya'l Qawmiyyah?* Pp. 62-65.

8 Ibid. Pp. 47-52.

9 For example, he says: "Everybody knows that two centuries ago Germany was divided into around four hundred states, statelets and independent free cities; and less than a century ago (al Husri was writing at the end of the 1950s. A. B.) it was still divided into around forty states. However, all those German states *became united thanks to a single language and its enduring impact*". Ibid. P. 72. (My italics).



the “history ingredient” is significantly enhanced by another factor – geographical contiguity; in al Husri’s view¹ this is a crucial element in the development of nationalism, since “the only social factor that has an overriding impact on language and history is geographical contiguity”². It should be noted, however, that “overriding impact” – in the sense al Husri uses it – does not mean that a Nation is formed by geographical contiguity alone (since there are numerous cases of geographical contiguity that do not provide the basis for a Nation); what is also required is for language and a common history to comprise the basis of the relationship between those inhabiting a contiguous geographical area. His thesis on the development of nationalism and a Nation is thus fully in line with German nationalism in its emphasis on language and history, particularly the former.

Just as al Husri discounts a single origin and religion as having a major influence on the formation of Nations, so too does he strongly reject economics as having a fundamental or dominant role; in fact, he expresses astonishment that anyone should maintain that it does³. In criticising the Marxists, who stress that there is a link between nationalism, the market and economic factors⁴, he devotes a significant part of that criticism to attacking Stalin’s views⁵ on the national question in general and the issue of economic unity in particular. His negative view of the role of economics is based on his hypothesis that “interest in general – and economic interest in particular – is not an ‘absolute’ but a

1 *Ara wa Ahaadith fi’l Wataniyyah wa’l ‘Qawmiyyah*, P. 29.

2 *Abhaath Mukhtaarah fi’l Qawmiyyah al ‘Arabiyyah*, P. 43.

3 “One group of writers and thinkers maintains that economic interests are the main motivating force that determines the course of social and political life. These people consider ‘common economic interests’ to be the foundation of all forms of unity. They say: ‘There can be no Nation without a common economic life’. In fact, economic factors play an important part in the lives of individuals and groups, and have a powerful effect on historical events and trends. However, this does not mean that economic interests should be considered to be the basis for creating unity and the cornerstone of the national edifice, as these exaggerators allege. Because every event in social and political life bears graphic witness to the fact that, if economic interests provide the ‘bond’ that binds some people’s activities together, it is also often the case that they are – on the contrary – ‘a cause of strife’ and a ‘divisive factor’ between other people. So if they promote unity in *some* cases, they also divide in many cases”. *Maa Hiya’l Qawmiyyah?* Part 3, P. 131. (My italics).

4 See his criticism of it. *Ibid.* Pp. 153-157.

5 See his criticism. *Ibid.* Pp. 141-148.



‘relative’”¹. He even goes so far as to claim – strongly – that the “idea that these are factors in the development of Nations and nationalisms is at odds with reason and logic”². Why should this be so? It is so because Nations and nationalism owe their origin to a feeling of belonging, and in fact “feelings of patriotism and nationalism have nothing to do with material and economic advantages and interests”, because they are inspired by “inclinations and emotions that are on a higher plane than mere self-interest”³.

So al Husri is critical of the Marxist theses that stress the central role of economics in creating Nations and nationalism and he endeavours to separate the two, while at the same time demonstrating his preference for the German school of nationalism, whose supporters discount the economic factor and its supposed impact.

In al Husri’s works we also come across another aspect of his nationalist discourse’s close parallels with German nationalist thought on this issue (i.e. factors relevant to the formation of a Nation); this can be seen in his passionate attack on the “role of the will” in the creation of Nations and nationalism. That hypothesis is the basis of French nationalist thought, which al Husri had little time for; in fact he strongly rejected it and objected to its writers’ and thinkers’ views on language and its role in forging national unity. The French attached no importance to the role of language and saw its function as being no more than – at best – a factor that might possibly encourage unity. In their view it did not actually create unity. This is Ernest Renan’s position and al Husri discusses his ideas⁴ critically from the viewpoint of German nationalism.

For their part, Renan and the French nationalists stress that nationalism is something determined by the will and that it has nothing to do with language or history.

1 Ibid. P. 131.

2 “To consider economic interests as being basic factors in the formation of ‘nationalism’ is at odds with the demands of reason and logic”. Ibid. P. 132.

3 Ibid. P. 135.

4 Ibid. P. 106.



Al Husri refutes the economic hypothesis by pointing out that interests change from one day to the next and that is not possible to establish a nationalism on the basis of a “variable”; nationalism requires a “constant”. He also refutes the “will hypothesis” on the grounds that “the will is not a constant, but a variable”; therefore “the idea that variable factors like these” should be fundamental to “the creation of a nationalism is incompatible with reason and logic”¹. What Renan regards as a “cause” – in al Husri’s view – is actually no more than a consequence²; that is to say, he believes that the will is “a consequence of the formation of a Nation, not a cause of its formation”³. Actions resulting from it (i.e. the will) are dependent upon the existence of the Nation and are accordingly positive or negative in consequence⁴.

The above is a very brief summary of al Husri’s views on the factors that lead to the formation of a Nation. We have touched on the role and status of language and history and the influence of German nationalist thought in shaping his approach to the question, including his critical view of the “economic” and “will” hypotheses as factors in that formation.

We should note, however, that the question of nationalism in modern political thought – including German political thought – does not merely apply to the Nation; it is also relevant to the State.

So let us now examine the relationship between Nation and State in Sati’ al Husri’s thought.

B – Nation and State

The Nation lies at the heart of nationalism in Sati’ al Husri’s thought and it is the “most fundamental of its fundamentals”, to the point that in his writings he sees the inseparable nature of the relationship between

1 Ibid. P. 111.

2 “A common will is not a cause of nationalism but a consequence”. Ibid. P. 112.

3 Ibid. P. 113.

4 “Individuals desire to live together when they belong to a single Nation, and they desire to live apart when they are from different Nations”. Ibid. P. 112.



“Nation” and “nationalism” as being self-evident. He makes scant reference to the nation-state; if such a reference does occur, it arises within the context of unification – that is, it emphasizes what is already accepted and indisputable: i.e. the Nation as a reality that predates the existence of a nation state, and the State as an intellectual construct and a major component of the concept of nationalism. For al Husri, the State does not exist in isolation from the concept of a Nation; or, to be more precise, let us say that it has no place except as a political adjunct of the social and fundamental entity expressed by the word Nation. Although al Husri passionately condemns the Arabs’ fragmented condition, in his writings his aversion to it does not drive him to the point of championing the State as a concept (it is primarily an intellectual and political matter), since when he looks at the question of the Nation in a cultural and social context, he tends to ignore its political aspect (the State) and its primacy over all other aspects.

We shall defer our critical discussion of this subject until we begin to examine his views on the relationship between Nation and State and the former’s pivotal role in that relationship.

Al Husri concedes that the Nation – that is to say, any Nation – needs a State to enable it to express its independent national identity; that is to say, it needs a political entity to enable it to achieve national unity and provide it with the means to bring an end to the fragmentation that is destructive to its social and historical existence. However, he stresses that the Nation’s need for a national State – or a nation-state – does not mean that the existence of the Nation is dependent upon the State¹.

This position contains a glaring contradiction. If the Nation has no need for a State in order to exist, then what is the point of struggling to create a nation-state? (If the Nation has no need of it, that is.) Al Husri, who is “bedazzled” by German nationalist thought, was not unaware of the fact that the Germans “noted the difference between the State and the

1 “Every Nation has the desire to establish its own State. However, the existence of a Nation is not dependent upon the existence of a State. And a Nation exists even if it has not reached the stage of forming a ‘nation-state’” Ibid. P. 32.



Nation before the French and the English; the existence of a multiplicity of German states was there for all to see, so they were aware of the difference between belonging to a single State and belonging to a single Nation”¹.

With his interest in, and knowledge of, Germany, it was obvious that al Husri should see “the Nation as one thing and the State as another”².

The distinction al Husri makes between the Nation and the State leads him to make further distinctions in his view of the complexities of the potential and actual relations between the two in modern history and the present day. Let us leave aside the question of whether the “actual” forms of that historical relationship between Nation and State were “genuinely actual” or imagined (or inferred in a way that served al Husri’s opinions and prejudices about that relationship). Instead, let us begin by recording that in his view they were not mutually complementary and interdependent in all historical situations. It may so happen that they correspond with each other to the extent that the one is only seen as a reflection of the other. Or it may happen that they are so incompatible that they can only exist in conflict with each other.

Here, then, we are faced with three different relationships between State and Nation: correspondence to the point of total conformity, non-correspondence, and absolute incompatibility. Al Husri cites historical examples of each of them.

In the first case, the State is the State of the Nation and the political expression of its national character, and both Nation and State are of “one substance”. In this example, the Nation would cease to be a fragmented collection of numerous different political entities and become a single nation-state. That was how France, Germany, Italy and other so-called “nation-states” came into being. Al Husri gives an exhaustive description of the process through which this transformation takes place and analyses the dynamics of its motivation³.

¹ Ibid. P. 34.

² Ibid. P. 34.

³ For example, see *Muhaadharaat fi Nushu’ il Fikrah ‘l Qawmiyyah*, in *Al A’maal al Qawmiyyah li Sati’ al Husri*, Part 1, Pp. 19-20.



In the second case, the State is a non-nation-state, or a State without a Nation, and its existence has no national content. In al Husri's view this is true of Belgium¹ and Switzerland², both of which are countries in which there is no correspondence between the State and the Nation.

In the third case – that of absolute incompatibility between the State and the Nation – the State is a structure that prevents the creation of the Nation and ultimately leads to the Nation separating from, or revolting against, the State. Examples of this can be seen in the cases of Bulgaria and Poland.

Al Husri makes it clear that he favours the first situation as being the perfect model for national unification. However, in doing so, he sees the nation-state as being hardly more than the epitome of the Nation; or rather, he only sees one side of the relationship - that is to say, the Nation – while the State, in his view, is one of its subsidiary parts! In his preoccupation with the unity of the Nation, he almost forgets that that unity consists of nothing other than the creation of that Nation's nation-state³.

Discussing another aspect of the relationship between State and Nation (which is indirectly linked to the first aspect referred to above), Sati' al Husri talks about four cases that are applicable to that relationship⁴. The first is that the Nation “may be comprised of one independent State”, in which homeland, State and Nation all correspond to each other. The second is that “the Nation may comprise a number of independent States”. In the third case “the Nation is not permitted to have its own State and belongs to a State that is foreign to it”, while in the fourth case the Nation

1 “The people of Belgium belong to a ‘single State’, but they do not form a ‘single Nation’”. *Ma'a Hiya'l Qawmiyyah?* P. 78.

2 “Switzerland is a State, not a Nation”. Ibid. P. 89.

3 In his reply to Diderot and the *Encyclopedistes*, and on the concept of a Nation in the *Encyclopedie*, Sati' al Husri wrote: “The nationalist movements in various countries were formed on the basis of ‘a revolution of Nations against States’; in some cases they aimed to separate the ‘Nation’ from the ‘State’ which ruled it. In other cases they sought to unify the peoples of the ‘Nation’ who were scattered among several ‘States’ in order to form a single ‘nation state’”. Ibid. Pp. 31-32.

4 See details in *Abhaath Mukhtaarah fi'l Qawmiyyah al 'Arabiyyah (Al A'maal al Qawmiyyah li Sati' al Husri)* Part 3, Pp. 24-25.



is “prevented from enjoying its independence and at the same time fragmented and divided among several States that are foreign to it”. In al Husri’s view there are historical and political examples of those four cases in recent times and the present day. The Swedish Nation is an example of the first, the German Nation – before it was unified in 1870 - is an example of the second, the Bulgarian Nation, which was subjected to Ottoman rule, is an example of the third, while the fourth is exemplified by Poland before the First World War.

If we apply this pattern to the Arab Nation, we will see that both the second and the fourth example of that relationship apply to its history over recent times. It was prevented from being independent and suffered fragmentation during the colonial period, while after the end of the foreign occupation of most of its territories it comprised over twenty separate states. However, like other nations that were subjected to similar conditions, it has remained – in al Husri’s view – a Nation and the fact that it has not achieved unity does not change its quiddity, or essence. The fact that it has not established its nation-state does not detract from this in his reckoning, since “the Nation is one thing and the State is something else”. And as long as they remain separate or different, as long as the Nation takes priority over the State and is an entity that predates it, the task of nationalist thought will be to focus on the Nation.

And that is precisely what al Husri did in most of his writings.

(II) Critical observations

In the above paragraphs we have endeavoured to present an overview of Sati’ al Husri’s main theses on the Nation, as well as the factors – both primary and secondary – leading to its formation. We have looked at his vision of the relationship between Nation and State, including the central role of the Nation in that relationship. Needless to say, this review will not relieve the reader of the need to refer to the man’s many works at their source, where he will find full details of al Husri’s defence of his theses, which we have only given in the briefest outline.



The reader will be amazed by the meticulous detail of al Husri's arguments, as well as by the breadth of his knowledge of the minutiae of world political history and the skill with which he applies that knowledge to produce a broad-ranging vision of the question of nationalism that is rarely to be found among members of his generation of Arab nationalist thinkers¹.

What follows are some critical observations of his views and theses that we have discussed above.

1 – Contradictions in al Husri's hypotheses

As we have shown, Sati' al Husri puts forward the idea that a Nation is based on language (and history) – a hypothesis influenced by German nationalist thought. Although this hypothesis has its merits, at least within the Arab context – including the fact that it discounts the claims of ethnicity and a common blood line, which means that it rejects any correlation between nationalism and racism² – it suffers from a number of scientific and historical lacunae, to a point where it becomes coloured by ideology-driven selectivity.

If one accepts the hypothesis of language being a fundamental or formative factor in shaping a Nation, and if Nations, States and events are classified in accordance with that hypothesis, one comes up against facts and realities that cannot be ignored or denied. Such a position also leads al Husri's hypothesis into the inconsistency that occurs in his theoretical premises, with the result that if a comparison is made between his *ideas* on the Nation (and the factors leading to its creation) and the *actual* formation of nations and nationalisms in the modern age, it will reveal the limits of their general and universal applicability (which is a basic condition of the theory) and show that he has adopted a process of blatant selectivity.

1 We say "of his generation" because some of those from the next two generations of nationalists who discussed these issues were less knowledgeable and less able to construct a theory. This is true of Qustantin Zareeq and Nadim al Bitar.

2 Paradoxically, nationalism of the Nazi variety was a departure from traditional nineteenth century German nationalism, which rejected the ethnicity hypothesis and stressed the importance of language and history.



Here are five brief critical observations:

A – If a common language is a factor in the formation of a Nation, as al Husri believes, then why can one not see the English and Americans (and Portuguese and Brazilians, and Chileans and Argentinians, and the Scandinavian Nations) as single Nations, considering that they share common languages? If al Husri does not regard America’s secession from Britain in 1776 as a national separation, but rather as a revolution against British repressiveness and unfair taxes¹, would this not mean that he – even if implicitly and reluctantly – he regards Britain and the United States as comprising one single Nation²?

That is to say, would it not mean that he is ignoring the facts of history and contradicting himself? And more importantly still, how can his thesis that “language equals Nation” explain why maps of Nations and linguistic maps do not correspond? How can it explain that there is such a disparity in the world between Nations (numbered in tens), States (of which there are not more than two hundred), and the thousands of languages which are spoken around the globe?

So there must be some mistake in this hypothesis.

B – If the French in France exist as a Nation because they have a common language - and if what prevents Switzerland and Belgium from being Nations (rather than just States) is the absence of a common language and the fact that their inhabitants are distributed among several languages – then would al Husri regard French-speakers in Switzerland, Belgium (and Canada and the Francophone countries of Africa) as forming part of the French Nation? And would this entitle France to demand the right to annexe the “French” areas of Belgium and Switzerland to the “French national entity”? You could also say the same thing about the German Nation, where the German State exists within its national

¹ *Muhaadharaat fi Nushu’ il Fikrah ‘l Qawmiyyah*, Part 1, P. 91.

² The aptness of this critical conclusion is not affected by al Husri’s statement that: “It does not make sense to take America’s secession from Britain as evidence of a lack of a link between nationalism and language”. (Ibid. P. 94), because that particular secession was not an exceptional instance in relations between societies and peoples who shared a common language.



boundaries and the language extends beyond those boundaries into Poland, Austria and Switzerland.

C – According to al Husri’s hypothesis, should we regard Arab émigrés who have lived abroad (in Europe and America) for decades (three generations or more) as being a part of the Nations in which they live, whose languages they speak and whose nationalities they hold? Or as part of the Arab Nation? And are the children of Arab émigrés (second and third generations, and in some cases fourth generations), who do not speak Arabic, are totally ignorant of the language and are fully integrated into the societies in which they grew up, not to be regarded as part of the Arab Nation because they do not know its language? On the other hand, if they are part of the Arab Nation due to some factor other than language, should we not then look for the roots of their *‘Urooba* in their ethnicity and origin: i.e. along a route that al Husri is unwilling to take? Does this not mean, then, that the weaknesses in the hypothesis lead to a sharp contradiction with its premises?

D – If the fact that they speak more than one language lies at the root of al Husri’s view that Switzerland and Belgium are States, not Nations, then why should the United States of America be regarded as a Nation despite the fact that a large number of languages are spoken there and many of its southern regions are Spanish-speaking and, moreover, despite the fact that al Husri himself recognizes that America only became linguistically united relatively recently¹?

E – Al Husri emphatically discounts religion as a factor in the formation of a Nation. However, in insisting that the Arab Nation’s only formative factors are language and history, he virtually ignores the decisive influence of Islam in ensuring the continuity of the Arabic language, even – or particularly- during the periods when the rulers were non-Arabs, and also in endowing Islam’s followers – particularly the Arabs – with a common history despite the fact that they comprised a number of different States and regions. Al Husri fails to realize that the Arabic language’s role in religious rites and the Islamic sciences ensured that it was saved from marginalisation

1 *Maa Hiya’l Qawmiyyah?* P. 91.



and decline and from being replaced by the languages of the powers that conquered and ruled the Arab region (most recently the Turks). He also fails to take note of the fact that the common historical link was Islamic and that the peoples of the region, with their different origins and languages, were absorbed by Islam into a single “spiritual Nation”. Accordingly, when it is isolated from its Islamic context, the language and history hypothesis lacks any scientific justification and looks like an ideological fabrication of facts which are not borne out by the realities of the Middle Ages.

* * *

These are a few fleeting observations on the hypothesis of the fundamental role of language in the formation of Nations, which occurs repeatedly in al Husri’s works. Let us now offer some comments on the proposition of geographical contiguity, as well as his dismissive attitude to the role of economics in promoting nationhood and national unity, and his rejection of the notion of the will.

We shall summarise them in the following critical observations:

A – Not every instance of geographical contiguity creates the conditions for the formation of a Nation. There are numerous regions that are contiguous but comprise numerous different national groups and can boast none of the conditions needed for the creation of a single homogeneous Nation. Could there not be a better example of this than the Balkans – a region which geographical contiguity has not prevented from being a “museum-piece” of disparate Nations and nationalisms? Moreover, in al Husri’s view, geographical contiguity is almost synonymous with merely having a common land border. The fact is that where the formation of Nations and nation-states is concerned, there are numerous cases in which “water barriers” between land areas have not prevented the creation of national entities, despite that fact that those “barriers” make communication between members of the population difficult. For thousands of years large numbers of the Greek and Japanese populations have been living on scattered islands, and this has not prevented the formation of two of the oldest Nations in history, who have created two of the greatest civilizations and cultures known to man.



Another case is the Indonesian archipelago. Here the challenging communication problems faced by its population and societies have not prevented its people from creating a Nation that is capable of exercising considerable influence in the world of today.

Hence al Husri's hypothesis of geographical contiguity appears to be an abstract concept which virtually ignores the realities on the ground.

B – Al Husri falls into the error that he accuses Michel Aflaq of perpetrating. He describes Aflaq's thinking as "abstruse and unworldly"¹. However, when he writes – in refutation of the role of economics in forming Nations – that "patriotic and nationalist feelings have nothing to do with material and economic advantages and interests" and that they are inspired by "inclinations and emotions that are on a higher plane than mere self-interest"², he does no more than resort to words and expressions that belong to the same class of thinking that he accuses Aflaq of embracing. For how else would one be able account for a phenomenon such as nationalism being described as no more than "feelings" and "emotions", unless it were based solely upon sentiment and faith? And even stranger than that is the fact that in al Husri's works this kind of mystical language coexists – or exists in contradiction – with the meticulous exactness in the way he expresses himself, which distinguishes him from his nationalist contemporaries, who wallow in romantic language about "the Nation".

Al Husri's problem with the role of the economic factor in forming Nations and promoting national unity is an ideological one; more precisely, it is inspired by his opposition to Marxism and Marxists, particularly Arab Communists and their fatuous positions on Arab unity. Although Stalin's speeches³ provided al Husri with the only easy Marxist ammunition he could find when settling his scores with the Marxists and their approach to the national question (and Stalin was a politician and certainly not interested in intellectual matters), on the occasions when he was not in

¹ *Hawl al Qawmiyyah 'l 'Arabiyyah*, Part 3, P. 158.

² *Maa Hiya'l Qawmiyyah?* P. 135.

³ Strangely, al Husri does not mention Marx's position on German unity or Lenin's views on the National Question.



“debating mode” he wrote coherently and objectively about the role of interest and advantage in the process of national unification¹.

C – We can find no convincing reason for Sati’al Husri’s criticism of the notion of the will playing a role in the creation of Nations and nationalism other than his strong bias in favour of German nationalism and its theories. It might be said that if the will were introduced as a factor in that creation process, it would “squeeze out” the fundamental concept of his thesis – i.e. the crucial role of language – and that he discounted it from his system of factors for that reason, just as Ernest Renan and the French nationalists, who were committed to the will hypothesis, discounted language from theirs.

In reality, al Husri could have recognized the influence of that factor (i.e. the will) - without seeing it as weakening his basic premise – if he had posited an interconnected system of factors and refrained from reducing the issue into a single factor in the way he did. For instance, he could have approached the subject from another angle entirely and considered some examples of national structures that were difficult to fit into his hypothesis. He could then have either cut them out of the equation or attempted to include them in his hypothetical system. Thus he could have posited that the lack of a common language had not prevented Belgium, Switzerland and Canada (and other states that do not share a single common language) from forming Nations and nation-states through a common will. The United States of America is another example of this, which al Husri could have counted as falling outside the scope of the language hypothesis without it having a major impact on the general question of linguistic unity as a factor in the formation of nations, particularly since he never denied that the USA was a latecomer to linguistic unity, having achieved it only after it had formed itself into a Nation.

It should be borne in mind that the concept of the will is closely linked to a very elementary question in nationalist thinking, which is: “What is an Arab?” That is, it is linked to a question that is related first and foremost to

¹ For example, see what he wrote on this issue in *Ara wa Ahaadith fi'l Wataniyyah wa'l 'Qawmiyyah*, P. 81.



the idea of the Nation before it concerns itself with notions such as unity and the nation-state. If al Husri replies to the question by discounting specifics such as “origin” and “ethnicity”, and stresses that an Arab is someone who speaks Arabic and belongs to the Arab cultural and historical space, then his definition poses two problems of its own which cannot be ignored. Firstly, there is the question we considered earlier of the *‘Urooba* of someone who does not speak Arabic and does not know the language (the children and grandchildren of Arab émigrés, for example); secondly, and more importantly, there is the problem of those who do not consider themselves to be Arabs¹. Even if they are from Arab social environments and speak Arabic, they cannot be forced to embrace *‘Urooba*; just as when those regarded as being of non-Arab “origin” (Kurds, Berbers, Circassians, Armenians) insist on their *‘Urooba*, their insistence can only be interpreted as a free expression of the will - on their part - to be Arabs.

Hence we can say that an Arab is someone who considers himself to be an Arab, even if he is not an Arab by virtue of his “origin” or language. Moreover, *‘Urooba* is not a tribal phenomenon but a matter of free and voluntary choice – i.e. a question of will. Discounting the will as a factor in the formation of a Nation – as al Husri does – produces a metaphysical view of *‘Urooba* and the Nation that we can only see as an impossibility as far as the achievement of nationalist realities is concerned.

* * *

The hypothetical system upon which Sati’ al Husri’s theses and ideas are based suffers from a serious defect which sometimes produces a sharp contradiction between their premises and their conclusions. At other times it leads to generalisations that are at odds with historical reality. However, a careful examination of the way al Husri constructs his hypotheses and sets out his premises will lead one to deduce that some of those “hypotheses” do not really belong to the “hypothesis class” at all, but are

1 It would be wrong to consider them as unconscious victims of a false ideology, because they include people who consciously and deliberately support other theories, including Egyptian (Pharaonic) and Lebanese (Phoenician) nationalism, regionalism and a religion-based state (Islam, Christianity). Some of them considered *‘Urooba* to be a political ideology concocted by Arab Christians or secularists, and that the only option was Islam, etc....



conclusions that are formulated to look like hypotheses. This kind of approach lays his arguments open to attack and could explain – at least – his penchant for selectivity when discussing Nations and nationalism.

Another even more apparent weakness of Sati' al Husri's discourse can be seen when he proceeds from the subject of the Nation to the relationship between State and Nation. This weakness may be described as gaps, or lacunae, rather than as contradictions.

2 – Cultural anthropology

One striking thing about al Husri is the profusion of his writings about the Nation, compared with the fact that he had very little to say about the State¹. This is particularly surprising because the cause he claims to espouse is Arab unity – a goal which is actually to be sought through politics and interests rather than through culture, language and historical connections; hence a State and political entity are fundamental in providing the framework for unity and endowing it with its political and institutional means of expression.

The question of the State is almost absent from al Husri's thought and writings. Where it does occur – and it only occurs very occasionally – it features incidentally, or as a side issue. What is even more absent is the role of the State in the formation of a Nation, because such a role is not feasible in an ideational system which sets up barriers between the Nation and the State and sees the Nation as having come first and the nation-state as being a product of it.

If the reader is prepared to overlook the fact that al Husri treats the concepts of Nation and nationalism as being synonymous, he will be most struck by his insistence on his fundamental hypothesis, which states that

1 On this topic Nassif Nassar says: "A reader of al Husri's works cannot help but raise his eyebrows and feel a sense of astonishment when he observes that al Husri – who called for Arab political unity and recognized the important role of nationalism in creating states from the early nineteenth century – never wrote anything of note on the role played by the State in the life of a Nation". *Tasawwuraat al Ummah'l Mu'aasirah – Diraasah Tahliiyah li Mafaahim al Ummah fi'l Fikr al 'Arabiyy al Hadith wa'l Mu'aasir*, Beirut, Dar al Amwaj, 2nd Ed. 1994, P. 262.



Nations predate nationalist movements and nation-states, and that the birth of the nationalist movements in the nineteenth century did not mark the birth pangs of Nations, since the latter (i.e. Nations) were social realities that existed before the appearance of any political expression of them. In this connection he says: “There is absolutely no room for doubt that nationalisms existed before the nineteenth century....And as for the assertion that nations were not formed before the nineteenth century, this is almost like saying that steam power did not exist before Denis Papin and James Watt...”.

Continuing on the same theme, he says: “The events of the nineteenth century did not create nationalisms. Nor did they produce nationalist tendencies. However, they provided the conditions that caused the aforementioned tendencies to play a part in the ‘formation of States’”¹.

The above quote reflects several contradictions in al Husri’s thought. If Nations – or, as he says, “nationalisms” – appeared before the nineteenth century, then why was it necessary for them to engage in such a long, hard struggle for national unification during that century? What is it that induces a Nation – a Nation that in al Husri’s view does not need a State in order to exist – to fight long and hard in order to establish a nation-state²? Does this not mean that a State is not just a political appendage to a tribal social “entity”, but rather a historical-political creation that provides the Nation with the means to enable it to exist? Why was the nineteenth century the century of nationalisms par excellence? Was it not because the concept of the State became linked to the concept of the Nation and the latter depended for its existence upon the former? And finally, what does national unity mean other than the existence of the Nation as a political-national entity – i.e. a nation-state?

There is no need to point out that if one removes the issue of the State from al Husri’s ideological system – whether as an entity with a role in

1 *Maa Hiya'l Qawmiyyah?* Pp. 157-158.

2 Nassif Nassar made the same critical point with the following question: “If the existence of the Nation does not depend upon the existence of the State, and if the Nation existed before reaching the point of forming a State....then why does every Nation wish to establish its own State?” *Tasawwuraat al Ummah'l Mu'aasirah*, Pp. 262-263.



forming a Nation or in connection with the question of national unification – this undermines his basic political premise: i.e. Arab unity. His ideology appears to be concerned not so much with the national unification of a splintered and fragmented Nation as with “asserting national unity”; at the same time it fails to recognize that the term “asserting its unity” would mean that a call for national unification is redundant and that an as yet unrealized goal had been transformed into a reality that has already been achieved.

Nassif Nassar was not far wide of the truth when he described al Husri’s concept of the Nation as belonging to the “linguistic-historical school”¹, since it only considered language and history² as factors in the formation of a Nation while ignoring all other factors. In fact, he produced a cultural anthropology of the Nation rather than a political theory about unity. And despite the fact that his concept is more useful and valuable than the ideas of other nationalist intellectuals - whose ideas on the Nation range from metaphysical and unhistorical (Zaki al Arsouzi) to romantic-mystical-missionary (Michel Aflaq) – it is preoccupied with the role of heritage-related factors (language and history) in forming a Nation, at the expense of the fundamental issue of the Arab nationalist concept: i.e. Arab unity; that is to say, the issue which can only be considered within the context of an unbreakable and mutually dependent link between the Nation and the State.

Hence, in this al Husri-style cultural anthropology, sacrificing the issue of the State and the centrality of its role in forming a Nation does not mean that the focus is exclusively on the question of the Nation alone. Rather, it involves a sacrifice of a different order – the sacrifice of the Nation itself because it is being considered in isolation from the State.

* * *

1 Ibid. P. 256.

2 Ilyas Murqus aptly observes that Sati’ al Husri failed to explain precisely how the historical factor was instrumental in the formation of Nations. Ilyas Murqus: *Naqd al Fikr al Qawmiy – Sati’ al Husri* (Beirut, Dar al Tali’ah, 1966, P. 71).



Sati' al Husri does not offer a serious theoretical contribution on the question of national unification. He has written little about Arab unity and its future potential and he lacks the intellectual inclination to discipline or temper the ideology he preaches. Instead, he tries to establish a theory of the Nation based on the ideas of German nationalism. However, the main failing of his “theory” is that it sees the Nation as a cultural (anthropological) notion, not a political concept. In his view the Nation should be seen as a social, historical and cultural reality rather than as a political entity; indeed, it should not be seen as a political entity at all, because its existence (in his opinion) is not determined – or even manifested - by political factors (i.e. a State). Al Husri – somewhat confusedly - identifies *‘Urooba*, which is a union or association bound by cultural-linguistic-historical ties, with the Arab Nation as an existential and political reality. In doing so, he changes the concept of *‘Urooba* from its “union” or “association” meaning to the sense of an “absolute” and “metaphysical” entity and treats the two as being synonymous. Hence in his view *‘Urooba* has the quality of being a Nation, while the State is an incidental detail that does not affect matters one way or the other.