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**Abstract:** *This article examines national identity formation in the Arab states of the Middle East as a dynamic political construct shaped primarily by state institutions and elite strategies. It argues that a “state-identity” logic has prevailed in the region, influenced by imperial legacies, particularly the Ottoman confessional system, and by colonial boundary-making that institutionalized competition among tribal, sectarian, and civic loyalties. The study further shows that postcolonial state-building under conditions of institutional weakness produced unstable identity regimes, while contemporary processes such as digital communication and diasporic interactions have intensified hybrid and transnational forms of belonging.*

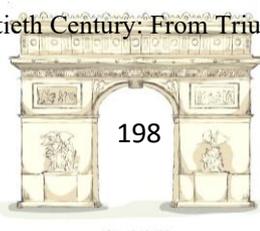
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The formation of national identity in Arab countries is viewed as a complex construct resulting from the centuries-long interaction of political, cultural, and civilizational factors. The interplay between tradition and modernization, religious values and secular ideas, colonial experiences and the struggle for national sovereignty has shaped the diversity of self-perception models within Arab societies.

The issue of national identity in the Arab states of the Middle East does not emerge as a natural consequence of ethnic, linguistic, or cultural homogeneity; rather, it manifests as a complex construct shaped by historical and political transformations over centuries. The development of national identity in the region was influenced by the formation of states with weak institutional foundations, the fragmentation of imperial structures, the artificial character of colonial borders, the stability of tribal and confessional communities, and the modernizing strategies pursued by ruling elites. Consequently, in the Arab states, unlike the “nation-state” model observed in European history, a “state-identity” logic has predominated<sup>20</sup>. Ya’ni davlat milliy identiklikni shakllantiruvchi asosiy sub’ekt vazifasini bajardi. In the region, identity has never been a fully formed, fixed category; rather, it is continuously reconstructed at the intersection of shifting political configurations, elite interests, and external influences.

The imperial legacy in the Middle East established the initial institutional framework for national identification. During the Ottoman and, to some extent, Safavid empires, the region’s social structure was organized not according to national or ethnic principles, but based on confessional-legal criteria. Within the Ottoman millet system, society was

<sup>20</sup> Dawisha A. *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair*. – Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003. –340 p.



classified by religious communities, such as Muslims, Christians, Jews, and others. The concept of citizenship was aligned with religious affiliation.

The administrative and territorial boundaries of the empire often did not correspond to the ethnic composition or historical-cultural realities of the region. For instance, Iraq historically comprised provinces such as Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul, which were socially and economically diverse and exhibited distinct regional differences. In the Bilad ash-Sham region, encompassing present-day Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, distinctions between urban and rural populations, tribal communities, and confessional groups contributed to the consolidation of local and communal identities. However, on the Arabian Peninsula, the dominant tribal system constrained the formation of centralized statehood. Some scholars emphasize that the empire provided a certain institutional foundation for a broader Islamic civilizational identity. Although the concept of the “umma,” as discussed by E.Said, F.Fanon, and F.Halliday, embodied religious and moral solidarity, it lacked the institutional capacity to establish a national-territorial political unity or a civic identity. Consequently, at the beginning of the 20th century, when national statehood projects emerged on the agenda, there was virtually no historical or institutional foundation to legitimize them<sup>21</sup>.

The political content of national identity was primarily shaped through state-building strategies implemented by ruling elites. In the Arab countries of the Middle East, by the mid-20th century, three main models of politically constructed national identity emerged: secular nationalism, Pan-Arabism, and Islamic legitimacy.

In Egypt, the concept referred to as “Misrism” or “Egyptianism” began to take shape during the Muhammad Ali dynasty (1805–1953), aiming to interpret the legacy of the ancient pharaonic state as a symbolic foundation for modern national identity. During Gamal Abdel Nasser’s presidency, Egyptian national identity was primarily rearticulated first through the ideals of “Egyptianism” and subsequently through Pan-Arabist principles. In 1956, the nationalization of the Suez Canal, followed by the establishment of the “United Arab Republic” between Egypt and Syria from 1958 to 1961, and the military-political struggle against Israel became key symbols of Pan-Arab identity. However, the defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War significantly weakened the ideological and political appeal of Pan-Arabism, reinforcing the predominance of the nation-state-based model of identity.

In Syria and Iraq, the ruling Ba’ath Party, drawing on the ideas of Michel Aflaq, sought to shape national identity through a top-down ideological mobilization under the slogan “Unity, Freedom, Socialism.” However, the prevailing ethnic and confessional realities in these countries were largely ignored by the state leadership, and political stability was often maintained through repressive mechanisms. In Syria, President Hafez al-Assad (1970–2000) relied on the Alawite minority, while in Iraq, President Saddam

<sup>21</sup> Саид Э. Ориентализм / пер. с англ. – СПб.: Русский мир, 2005. –368 с.; Fanon F. *The Wretched of the Earth* / Transl. by C.Farrington. – New York: Grove Press, 1963. – 320 p.; Halliday F. *The Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics and Ideology*. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. –374 p.



## MODERN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AND INNOVATIVE TEACHING SOLUTIONS

Hussein (1979–2003) depended on a small Sunni elite. Consequently, Shia and Kurdish populations were largely excluded from meaningful political participation. This situation limited the inclusiveness of national identity projects and deepened ethno-confessional divisions.

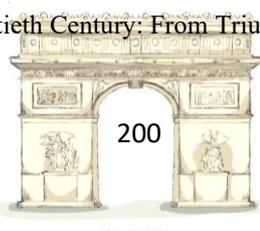
In Jordan, the monarchy has built its legitimacy on the history of the royal lineage, descent (linked to the Prophet's family), agreements with tribal elites, and religious symbols. As a result, national identity in Jordan is expressed in a hybrid form, combining royal-sacred symbols with modern state institutions. In the case of the Hashemite dynasty, "patron-client" relations with tribal elites, along with a relatively pragmatic foreign policy, have made Jordan one of the region's most stable monarchies.

In the Middle East, tribal, confessional, and ethnic structures have consistently acted as competing centers of identity in the formation of Arab national identity. In Jordan, tribal loyalties have historically persisted as a form of social cohesion often stronger than loyalty to the state. The Hashemite dynasty, having migrated from the Arabian Peninsula, consolidated its legitimacy in the region through alliances with local tribes, and these alliances became the institutional foundation for the country's political stability. In Lebanon, confessional affiliation takes precedence over civic identity, with the political system structured around quotas and agreements among Sunni, Shia, Maronite, Druze, and other communities. Ethnic diversity can be considered a potential resource; however, it is effective only in the presence of an inclusive concept of citizenship and a pluralistic state model. Otherwise, diversity may contribute to the fragmentation of national projects and the emergence of competing identities.

The postcolonial context and globalization processes propelled the development of national identity in the Arab states of the Middle East to a new stage from the second half of the 20th century. The defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war weakened the political appeal of pan-Arabism in the Arab world and led to a resurgence of nation-state-based identity model<sup>22</sup>. The wave of rising religious extremist sentiments in the Arab states during the 1970s–1990s demonstrated the limitations of modernist secular projects, increased societal demand for a religiously framed form of identity, and contributed to the emergence of alternative models of national identity aligned with Islamic symbols. Simultaneously, the legitimacy crisis in colonial and postcolonial states, along with the dependence of Arab countries on external patrons such as the United States, Great Britain, France, and Russia (USSR), weakened the narrative of national sovereignty and shaped the interpretation of national identity through the lens of relations with foreign powers. Arab davlatlaridagi neft zaxiralari mintaqani jahon geostrategik raqobatining ustuvor nuqtasiga aylantirdi.

After the collapse of the former Soviet Union, the United States became the primary external power in the Middle East, further consolidating its role as an actor directly influencing the region's political architecture. The 1991 "Desert Storm" military

<sup>22</sup> Dawisha A. *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair*. – Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003. –340 p.



operation and the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which led to the removal of President Saddam Hussein from power, resulted in the disintegration of state institutions, the emergence of a power vacuum, and a deepening of ethno-confessional disorder within society. Consequently, the governance crisis in Iraq created the conditions for the emergence of radical extremist entities such as the “Islamic State.” This situation demonstrated that internal conflicts inherited from the postcolonial period could pose threats not only to national stability but also to regional and global security.

At the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, the content of identity politics in Arab states underwent significant transformations. Increased mediatization, the proliferation of transnational communication channels, the growing activity of diasporas, and the emergence of hybrid identity models introduced new dynamics into Arab societies’ processes of self-understanding. Satellite television channels, in particular Qatar’s “Al-Jazeera,” which began broadcasting in 1996, reshaped the Arab mass communication landscape and created a singular platform for pan-Arab political debates. As Mark Lynch emphasizes, these channels produced an “Arab information space,” establishing a unified arena for pan-Arab media discourse and interaction<sup>23</sup>. The popularization of the Internet and social networks introduced new dynamics into political processes in Arab states. During the 2010–2012 period of the “Arab Spring,” digital platforms created an alternative space for youth beyond traditional control institutions, becoming a primary tool for political and social mobilization. In this way, the digital society emerged as a crucial source for the new identity practices developing across Arab countries.

Conclusion. Theoretical conclusions regarding the formation of national identity in the Arab states of the Middle East shaped by the state, political and religious elites, confessional and tribal structures, as well as external actors are confirmed through the examples of Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq. The experiences of these countries demonstrate that national identity in the Arab world did not develop along a single trajectory but rather represents a complex political phenomenon formed in diverse historical, institutional, and social contexts.

In the Arab states of the Middle East, national identity represents a political construct shaped by the state, political and religious elites, confessional structures, as well as regional and international actors. Colonial and postcolonial processes served as significant institutional factors in the formation of Arab national identity. In the region, the logic of “state-identity” predominated, with the state acting as the primary actor in creating national identity. Globalization and diasporas have given rise to new forms of transnational identity. In the Arab Middle East, nationality is not a stable phenomenon but manifests as a dynamic system that is re-evaluated under conditions of political crisis.

<sup>23</sup> Lynch M. *The New Arab Wars: Uprisings and Anarchy in the Middle East*. – New York: Public Affairs, 2016. – 284 p.



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