

The Arab National Character : A Critique

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The aim of this article is to expose some of the pitfalls that an unscientific concept such as that of the "national character" can lead to when used in what is supposed to be a scientific study of a particular people.

In the first part, I present a brief sketch on the origins of the concept. In the second part, by taking Patai's comprehensive study, **The Arab Mind** as a representative sample of this genre of literature, I illustrate how, by using such a concept as a tool of social analysis, fiction and fantasy may sometimes be substituted for scientific explanation. In the conclusion, I state briefly the main faults and contradictions that are contained within the assumptions of such a method of analysis.

Highlights On The Origins of the Concept:

The concept of "national character" is a residue from prescientific ages. It is directly connected with the idea of nationalism, though it may be traced back to any form of individual identity with a group.

Some analysts place the birth of modern nationalism as no earlier than the second half of the eighteenth century, with the French Revolution being its first great manifestation.¹

Such "modern nationalism" usually marks the rise to power of the new bourgeois class who imaginatively used an intensive nationalistic ideology in order to unite behind itself the great masses of people until then dominated by the narrow localism of feudal society. The new class, to promote this kind of new nationalism, used all the symbolic props of the nation-state: flags, marches, march music, and song. To instill identity with, and love of the new state, art, literature, philosophy, history, myth, and all kinds of folklore were used. The nation-state, with its symbols, the traditions of its masses, its land, rivers, lakes, forests, and mountains, was romanticized, idealized, and worshipped. Nationalism was the new ideology that served to unify multiple groups otherwise separated by many differences in culture, stages of development, class interests, etc.

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The nationalism of France became an aggressive force that threatened other regimes, and disturbed the stability of the rest of Europe. It triggered other nationalisms in neighboring countries, for these had to search for unifying common identities, even at a time when they were still suffering from political divisions. The nation-state became the ultimate model to achieve, and loyalty to it was to supersede all other loyalties.

Common traits had to be discovered even when differences were more dominant. What is a nation ? This became the burning question, and the answers to it were as varied as the situations and purposes of the political forces behind them. A common language, history, customs, culture, land, religion, and other criteria were used as determinants of nationality. When none of these factors was present, or when the one that was present was not enough to incite passion, the "uniqueness", "peculiarity", or "superiority" of particular races or cultures was emphasized. When the objective physical world failed to provide the "peculiarity" required, some nationalist ideologues "discovered" a national or Folkish spirit, a "geist" which tied the human soul to that of other souls within the nation, which in turn was tied to the national landscape, and to the cosmos as a whole.² States that had already been in existence discovered that an intensified nationalist ideology strengthened their internal structure, mollified and obscured their class conflicts, and created solidarity against external forces in spite of all the internal divisions. Political forces that could obtain power only through the establishment of a new state sought "self-determination" through a nationalistic ideology that emphasized the differences between them and those from whom they wanted to secede. Other political forces that sought unification of various existing states tried to discover some common denominator, real or imagined, that could serve as a rallying cry for mass mobilization of the various groups. With such a diversity of purposes served by a nationalistic ideology, it is no wonder that no definite agreement has been reached as to what constitutes a nationality.

But nationalism is only one form of setting the boundaries of a group. Since man has always had to live in groups, the extent of such boundaries has varied with the stage of social development of such groups, and the type of conflict in which they were involved. We must emphasize the role of conflict in the determining of the boundaries between the "Us" and the "Them", for without conflict, there is no call for sharpening and exaggerating the differences between the two parties. In severe bloody conflict, "Us" must not only be different from "Them" but must be its direct opposite. Otherwise, how would our killing them be justified ? When

conflict is between families, tribes, villages, cities, nations, or groups of nations, something like the "Us" and "Them" syndrome must occur. The longer the conflict, the more severe and lasting the syndrome. Even when the two conflicting parties are more or less of the same stock, stage of development, culture, and religion, etc., some fictitious opposing traits, ancestry, or symbols, are usually invented.

The boundaries between the "Us" and the "Them" are determined by the boundaries of the conflicting parties. In the age of European colonialism, the boundaries were much enlarged, and the stage of development, race, and force itself, became the main criteria for distinguishing between the "Us" and the "Them". The differences among the otherwise conflicting nationalities of Western Europe were minimized, and they all merged into the one superior entity of the "White Man", the "Western mind", "Western civilization", etc., as opposed to the "Eastern mind", the "coloured races", the "barbarian", "savage", or "inferior" races, etc. It must be recalled that in earlier centuries, such as during the Crusades, the confrontation between East and West was expressed in religious symbols. Christianity then became a great unifying force among the Western peoples in their confrontation with the Muslims, the "heathens" as they were called. A few centuries earlier, a great number of conflicting Arabian tribes were unified under the banner of Islam to confront the "heretic" world of Persia, Byzantium, North Africa, and others.

It is of interest that in our own time, particularly at the height of the Cold War, even in literature that was supposed to be about the "national character", we find that the analysis loses sight of the nation-state, and focuses rather on the "democratic personality" as opposed to the "authoritarian personality". The fact that the "national character" is no longer national in this case shows clearly the change in the nature of the conflict from that between nations to that between two camps of nations. The search is no longer for contradictory national traits, but for common traits, a "modal personality" that typifies man in Western democracies as opposed to man in the "totalitarian" states. According to Inkeles, the "democratic character" believes in the worth and dignity of the self, with warmth and trust toward other people based on a belief in the perfectibility of man, with a stress on personal autonomy, a distance from, and distrust of, authority, all this with a love for variety and encouragement of differences of interest and achievement, etc. As can be seen, and as the author himself states, "the democratic character emerges at the opposite pole from the authoritarian personality syndrome."³ It should be obvious that the conceptualization in this kind of literature reflects the nature of the

major conflict of our time. But in this case, instead of stating such a conflict in terms of capitalism versus socialism, it becomes a “democratic personality” versus an “authoritarian personality”, which is a clever ideological strategy.

Since capitalists are a small minority, their cause may not be the cause of the masses. By creating the ideal “democratic personality”, not only would the masses be involved in the struggle against their opposites, “the authoritarians”, but it is also implied that if capitalists possess some extra political power, they do so by the consent of all the people.⁴

Ideology is not necessarily all mythical, illusory, or metaphysical. Actually, there is no reason why it may not be scientific. What distinguishes ideology, however, is that it is used to justify either a political structure or a political action. And since its primary motivation is political, there is always the danger of its mixing science and fiction.

It must be emphasized, however, that “national character” and related concepts (modal personality, mind, national values, national culture, etc.) is not in all cases consciously used as ideology, and even when used as such, this is not what makes it unscientific. Rather, what makes it so is that it accepts unquestionably the boundaries of a population that have been determined by political conflict, then takes whatever attributes it can find among individuals or groups within such a population and arbitrarily considers such attributes as typical of such a population, distinguishing it from the rest of humanity.

Hopefully, all these points will be clarified in the following case study:

Portraying the “Arab Mind”:

Anthropologist Raphael Patai’s book, *The Arab Mind*⁵, may be considered as an embodiment of all the aspects, methodologies, and weaknesses of using the “national character” and related concepts in order to portray a collective “mind” of millions of people. There are some 140 million Arabs, living under more than twenty diverse regimes. Some are tribal and nomadic, some rural, some urban, some rich, some poverty-stricken, some highly educated, some illiterate and ignorant, some deeply religious, some secular and modern, some conservative, some revolutionary. They constitute a whole range of people distributed all the way between the Arabian Peninsula to the far west of North Africa. And yet, to Patai, they are all the possessors of one “national mind”. How did

Patai set the boundaries for such a "mind" ? He explains that "human beings who grow up in a common environment, exhibit beyond their individual differences, a strong common factor in their personality." He also suggests that since the "modal personality" is the trait most frequently found in a group studied, the national character would be "the sum total of the motives, traits, beliefs, and values shared by the plurality in a national population." Since the "modal personality", Patai continues, should be applied to more narrowly delimited groups and the "national character" should be applied to a larger one," the national character consists of the sum total of the modal personality structures found in the national population⁶. But how was it decided that all Arabs grew up in a common environment ? If we assume that the Arab societies are capable of producing a great number of "modal personalities" (which Patai mentions but never clearly identifies), how was it decided that out of these "modal personalities" there should emerge one national character for all the Arab countries combined ? For example, if Islam is a powerful influence, then why stop at the border of the Arab countries ? If, on the other hand, each political regime tries to produce loyalties for itself, how did a national character of the whole emerge ? It is true that a great number of Arabs, particularly the politically conscious among them, have aspired for unity, but is such aspiration enough to describe them as possessors of one group "mind" ? Even those who express such a desire do not think so.

It soon becomes obvious, after reading Patai, that he is more politically motivated than scientifically, and that his whole work is inspired by the Arab-Israeli conflict, and that the "mind" he is talking about is nothing more than the abstract "character" Israel would like to think she is engaged in conflict against. Since Israel is fighting "Arabs" and not just Palestinians or Syrians, this calls for identifying the one enemy, the Arab, and, as in all such conflicts, both facts and fiction must be used in order to sharpen the differences between the warring parties. Working for such an aim, we cannot but admit that Patai has succeeded in producing quite an engaging, and often amusing piece of literature, and it should come as no surprise that his book has been popular. People have always enjoyed the well-drawn caricatures of their avowed enemies. Perhaps the classic tale of David versus Goliath stands out as an imaginative model of this kind for all time.

We cannot dispute that some of the traits mentioned by Patai may exist to some degree at least in some sections within Arab society. Actually, quite often Patai relies on some observations made by some Arab intellectuals (occasionally quoting them out of context), exhorting their

own people to change their backward outlook and habits in order to solve some of their social problems, and improve their way of life. Sometimes, Patai uses psychological or anthropological studies carried out in very small Arab localities, and often by Arab social scientists. Other times, Patai depends on some casual observations made by visitors and colonialists (and occasionally some Arab "Uncle Ahmeds" who think of themselves as having "evolved", and therefore justified to parrot what the colonialists have taught them about the natural inferiority of their own people). But what might have been tentatively suggested as true for a certain time and place, to Patai becomes a permanent Arab feature. Even the Arab folk proverbs and sayings, not one of which does not have its exact opposite, are taken as expressive of the twists and turns of this permanent anatomic mind.

It is of revealing interest that Patai uses some often quoted statements about the "Arabs" from the famous Muqaddimah (Introduction) of Ibn Khaldun, the fourteenth century Arab scholar as his first rough sketch of the "overall Arab national character".

Patai quotes Ibn Khaldun as describing Arabs as a savage nation, and stating that they are people who plunder and wipe out civilization, and that "savagery has become their character and nature", that they need religious coloring to obtain authority because they are unwilling to subordinate themselves to each other; they are "rude, proud, ambitious, and eager to be the leader". Patai dutifully mentions that Ibn Khaldun writes that about the Bedouins (the desert nomads), but nevertheless, he (Patai) goes on to describe these statements as "the Khaldunian view of the Arab national character", for "he (Ibn Khaldun) was not entirely free of the universal tendency of intellectuals to fault rather than praise their countrymen."⁷

But any student of Ibn Khaldun knows well that this was not at all what Ibn Khaldun was doing. He was not painting a morphological frozen picture of his countrymen, and when he used the word "nation" ("Umma" in Arabic), he did not mean it in the same sense it is used in modern times. Actually, Ibn Khaldun was speaking about people under certain particular material conditions, having to eke out a living from a hostile desert. "Arabs" in this sense did not even have to be Arab in ethnicity, for Ibn Khaldun calls other ethnic groups living under the same conditions by the same name, and describes vividly the contradictions and conflicts between these Arabs and the other settled and urban Arabs living under "royal authority". But to our modern scientist, an Arab is an Arab, all 140 million

of them. Even a general Khaldunian principle about how the vanquished try to imitate the victor in customs, manners, style of dress, etc., a phenomenon that was meant to apply to all people, becomes to Patai another typical trait of the Arabs after they succumbed to European domination.

In the following paragraphs, I shall try to briefly give some representative examples of the observations offered by Patai as representing certain traits of the "Arab Mind", followed by the explanations offered by the author as to how these traits have come to be what they are. What will be disputed is not the existence or non-existence of these traits. There can be no doubt that some of these may exist within some strata or localities in the Arab world. Our quarrel will be with the non-scientific generalizations that follow the one-step circular cause-effect explanations, picked from any source, discipline, saying, or fantasy that can be found. Let us examine some of the peculiarities of this "Mind":

Proposition: Arabs believe in talk and often substitute words for action. They give verbal threats without carrying them out. They believe in the power of words.

Explanation: In this case, mass Freudian psychoanalysis satisfies the purpose. We are informed that in Arab society the male is breast-fed for two to three years. To the child, the breast means a pleasurable gratifying experience. This pleasure object in the Arab world is at the boy's disposal, and wherever the mother goes, she carries the boy with her. All the boy has to do is ask, and his demand shall be fulfilled. According to this theory, such an early experience cannot but leave its permanent mark on the Arab personality; hence, the uttering of words vehemently is a satisfying act. The author does not explain how, after the child is weaned, the uttering of words continues to be satisfying, without the breast. I suppose we must assume that after the second or third year, experiences, even frustrating ones, can no longer affect the personality.

There is another explanation:

In Arab society, mothers often issue vehement verbal threats without carrying them out.* Presumably, children raised this way will grow up following the same type of behaviour. It is not

explained however, how the women developed this same trait as the men, for much importance is given to the fact that baby girls are raised differently and breast-fed for only a few months. We are then justified in asking: if it was the length of the lactation period that made the men develop such a quality, what was it then that made the women develop that same quality, though they were treated differently at that early formative stage ?

Whatever the case may be, the author, having penetrated into the very core of the Arab mind, decides that his finding would explain why the Arab leaders keep threatening Israel without ever taking any real action.⁹ We presume that since Arab kings, presidents, and heads of states of all kinds must have all been breast-fed till the age of two or three, they must still be under the illusion of obtaining their pleasurable object (in this case the destruction of Israel) by the sheer uttering of words.

But is this really an Arab or a universal human (and animal) trait ? All people will substitute words for action when faced with a stronger force than their own. As far as I know, there are blasphemies, profanities, and obscenities in every language. Psychologists have even given some professional labels to such behavior: defense mechanisms, displaced aggression, compensation, etc.¹⁰ Frustrated people everywhere have been seen threatening, uttering obscenities, kicking walls, breaking vases etc., when they could not get at the source of their frustration.

But the Arabs did take action against Israel in October, 1973, just a few months after Patai published his book. In the preface to the second edition (1975) he says that the arguments of the critics on this issue were not well taken, for he had never said that the Arabs would **never** carry out a threat, but that they had a proclivity for substituting words for action. The author further reminds his readers that he had also mentioned another "counter-motivation" of the Arabs: they must restore their damaged honor. Revenge is something they have inherited from as long ago as pre-Islamic days."¹¹ So then the Arabs fight just to restore their honor, and not to regain their lost land. This way, whether the Arabs do take action, or they do not, it can all be explained by the quirks of their personality, inflicted by two drives contradicting each other, and thus our scientist's predictions must always be right.

Proposition: Arab men consider women as sex objects. The Arab male self-image is that he should take advantage of any woman who strikes his fancy.

Explanation: Here again a Freudian explanation is a handy one. This Arab trait is connected with the relationship between the child and the females in the house. A female infant, we are told, is left to cry without evoking attention. A male infant, however, is immediately picked up, petted, and pampered by the mother and all other females. Among the peasants of Upper Egypt, the comforting and soothing may include the handling of the genitals to make the child smile (and this is based on an anthropological study in a village in Upper Egypt).¹² Now this may be a local custom, it is true, but since the village in Upper Egypt is Arab, we can conclude that the Arab child associates the mother, and hence women in general, with erotic pleasure, and this is how the Arab adult gets to stereotype women as sex objects who cannot resist sexual temptation.

Proposition: Arabs have no sense of time. They cannot be punctual.

Explanation: This must be a different case from all other people in a pre-industrial stage, where there is no shortage of time, or where people may not even possess watches. And even in the newly rich countries, where modern technologies have been introduced, and where watches are sold, we cannot expect people to change all their old ways overnight. They do begin to learn to become aware of time, but they cannot be expected to use it with perfect efficiency immediately. Unlearning and relearning is a lengthy process.

But, no, such explanations which would apply to all human beings do not agree with Patai's purpose, where the root of the problem must be typically Arab.

In this case, the culprit turns out to be the Arabic language itself! The Arabic verbs, the author tells us, have no tenses like the English where the past tense corresponds to past action, present tense to present action, etc., for in Arabic, the tenses are confused, where the perfect form can refer to the future, the imperfect can refer to the past, the past may refer to the present and so on... (Actually, the confusion here is the author's own, for though he pretends to be knowledgeable of the Arabic language, his knowledge obviously is very superficial, but this is beyond our concern here. Though the Arabic tenses may not correspond in their forms to the English tenses, the Arabic verbs are precise in as far as time sequences,

whether in the written language, or in any of the various spoken colloquials, and any Arabic speaking person, even the illiterate, uses them with precision.)

Patai deduces from the above, that to people using such a language, "time cannot have the same definite, ordered and sequential connotations."

Another reason for Arab unawareness of time, the author informs us, must be found in Koranic "ahistoricity", for in the Koran, the past is an undifferentiated entity, and past events are not arranged in the right sequential order. So now since Arabs are Muslim, it is only natural that the Koran must have left its mark on their mental make-up, and it is no wonder they cannot until now, differentiate their present from their past.

Even their historians, Patai informs us, saw the past in "batches" of events without any definite timing. Even "that greatest of all Arab historians, Ibn Khaldun defined history this way: " 'History refers to events which are peculiar to a particular age or race.' " You notice, he did not mention time !

Patai observes that the Hebrew language was also confused in its verb tenses in the past, but now it has been modernized, and the old ambiguities have been corrected. He suggests that the Arabs now must also modernize their language so that their tenses follow "the standard Average European."¹³ But since the Arabs are proud and satisfied with their language, and since they are not willing to change their Koran, we must presume they will never learn how to be punctual. It is a hopeless case.

Proposition: Arabs have a great propensity for feuding and fighting among themselves. There is now a call for Arab unity, but nothing can overcome Arab divisiveness.

Explanation: This time Patai discovers the root of the evil in the Arab "ethos". It goes back all the way to pre-Islamic heritage, and somehow, in this case, it merges with the other Near Eastern civilization, for example, the biblical "An eye for an eye" must have had something to do with it. The Arabs, however, have their own sayings to the same effect: "Blood demands blood." On Arab divisiveness based on lineage, this famous popular saying expresses it best: "I against my brother; I and my brother against my cousin; I and my cousin against the world."

While medieval Ibn Khaldun had explained these tribal conflicts in terms of a struggle for survival, a conflict over scarce resources, to our twentieth century social scientist, an explanation must be sought in all-controlling cultural values.

According to this view, what had been a tribal code in response to a certain physical situation becomes an eternal curse, even centuries after the situation had changed. Accordingly, such internal wars, as the Yemeni civil war or the conflict between the Palestinian guerrillas and the Jordanian army are not seen as resulting from a present conflict of interests, or a present struggle for power, just like any other civil war anywhere else, but as manifestations of the fratricidal tendencies deep in the Arab psyche.

When some Arab analysts try to explain why Arabs fail to achieve unity, and mention several factors such as foreign power interference, diversity of political aims, economic and social disparity, dynastic rivalries, etc., the author calls the entire approach "ahistorical", for the divisive elements are sought in contemporary development, and these Arab analysts are told that they should have searched for the roots of Arab disunity in the "historic subsoil of pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arab life ..."¹⁴

It must be recalled that it is the Arabs who are supposed to confuse their past with their present.

Proposition: Arabs have an aversion to manual labor, particularly that which involves "dirtying one's hands."

Explanation: It must first be remembered that millions of Arabs do work with their hands, and the ones who refuse to are those who consider themselves upper class. The fact that this has always been the case in all pre-industrial class societies, (including Greece, Rome, India, and all of Europe before industrialization) does not provide the author with any clues. But then, how would the Arabs be any different from the rest of the world ?

So, out of all places, Patai finds one answer to this Arabian symptom in the Bible itself, in the Book of Genesis where God is reported to have told Adam: "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in toil shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life in the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread ..."

This is why, Patai tells us, to the Arab, "work is a curse." This is the diametrical opposite, we are told, of the western Protestant work ethic. But something odd and mysterious must have happened in this case, for the word of prophecy must have hit the wrong people. The Koran, telling the story of Adam and Eve does not contain the "work curse". But, somehow, it turned out that those whose holy book is the Koran ended up with the "work curse", while those whose holy book is the Bible ended up with the Protestant ethic.

There is another explanation for this same Arab trait. This is to be found (again) in the Bedouin ethos. There is a contempt among Bedouins for all physical labor" with the exception of the tending of the livestock and raiding". Bedouins despise agricultural work, Patai says.¹⁵ (The obvious material fact that Bedouins, forced to live in the desert, must live off their livestock and raiding, and that agriculture in the desert cannot be very rewarding, does not seem to occur to Patai who is searching for reasons lying deep in men's souls.) But here again, something must have gone wrong in the historical process, for the Bedouin ethos seems to have hit hardest those most remote from nomadic life: the middle and upper strata of urban people, while the closer people to the desert, the millions of peasants and manual workers have continued to "dirty their hands", working very hard to earn a living under severe and unrewarding conditions, regardless of their supposed ethos, and without any Protestant ethic. (Some surveys may have shown that some Arab peasants do not love their work (who would ?), but they do it all the same.)

This ethos that can make industrialization very difficult, Patai explains in another section, is not restricted to the Arabs. Only the national character of the Western people has been imbued with what Max Weber termed the Protestant ethic. Very few other people have been blessed with such a national character. The Arabs undoubtedly belong to this majority of the world whose national character does not provide a fertile soil for industrialization, and which is not innovation-oriented.¹⁶ However, Arabs must appreciate it in this case, since, at least they are not alone, even if they do belong to a less fortunate type of humanity.

Proposition: Arabs take a polarized view of the world. They see everything in extreme contrasts, with no gradations in between.

Explanation: Several Western scholars have noticed this same mental peculiarity. Lawrence of Arabia, for example, wrote this: "Semites had no half-tones in their register of vision. They were

people of primary colours, or rather of black and white, who saw the world always in contours their thoughts were at ease only in extremes" Now this could easily be interpreted as a racist anti-Semitic statement, but apparently it does not bother the author, for it is well known that Lawrence of Arabia was speaking about Arabs, and not about other Semitic people. So, we presume, there is nothing objectionable to that.

Another notable Western scholar, Leon Gauthier, the French colonialist professor at Algiers University at the turn of this century, and who specialized in contrasting the Western spirit with that of the Eastern (mainly Arab) spirit, also wrote statements close to those of Lawrence about the polarity of the Arab mind.

Scholar Patai himself, who, (like these other two gentlemen), has always had a life-long romantic attachment to Araby,¹⁷ as he tells us in his preface, can corroborate the observations of these two gentlemen through repeated empirical experiments of his own: After an Arab theatrical or play, scientist Patai would stretch his ears and overhear the comments of the audience as they converged in the aisles. "Almost invariably", Patai reports, these comments were expressed in black and white; the play was judged either excellent, magnificent, great, or terrible, disgusting, stupid, without qualifications, or anything in between. This is an experimental proof that Arabs can only see in black and white.

These extremes in the Arab national character, we are informed, express themselves in several other forms: calmness and sudden outbursts of temper, unity and divisiveness, shame and honor, aggression and submission, vengefulness and forgiveness, competitiveness and mutual help, prevarication and honesty, etc.¹⁸

Patai does not offer any scientific explanation in this case. This will remain a tantalizing question, he says. He does not reject Gauthier's explanation (which he quotes at length, and later in the discussion tries to imitate) of how the soul of a race reflects the landscape it inhabits. The Arab soul is affected by the Arabian desert where "a torrid summer is followed by a rigorous winter ... an icy night comes after a burning day .."¹⁹ Such a mystical explanation reminds us of some of the Volkish racist theories where the Jews, being a desert people, were viewed as shallow, arid, dry people, while the Germans, living in the dark, mist-shrouded forests, were deep, mysterious, and profound.²⁰ Patai, however, objects to the word "race", for today, he says, we prefer the term "people".²¹

Proposition: The Arabs are fascinated by the West, and yet they express great hostility towards it. They accuse the West of sinister selfish imperialist aims in its dealings with the Arabs. They want to adopt many of the things that typically belong to the Western culture, i.e., literacy, technology, science, scholarship, the welfare state, luxuries of all kinds, etc., and yet some intellectuals accuse the West of sinister cultural designs to lull the Arabs into a “spiritual torpor” in order to keep them dependent on Western science and know-how.

Explanation: There are several explanations for this, the most important of which may be the following: the polarized mind of the Arab that we have just explained above, the Arab cultural “inferiority complex”, the Arab “proclivity to exaggeration”, the Arab’s proclivity to blame others for his own faults, the Arab’s sense of marginality (the intellectual Arab is unable to detach himself from his culture and unable to ignore Western culture), the Arab’s extreme sense of honor, etc.²² In other words, it is the Arab mind’s multiple complexes that cause this hostility to the West; it has nothing to do with conflicting interests in the actual relationships between the Arabs and the West. Apparently, all these conflicting interests do not really exist, but they are part of the hallucinative nature of the Arab mind.

To show how unrealistic Arabs are, Patai observes that Arabs do not hate the Turks even though the latter had ruled them for 400 years. But they hate the West even though it only ruled them altogether for about a hundred years.

One reason for this is “undoubtedly” religious identity, for the Turks are Muslim and the West Christian. Besides, Arabs feel that the West was their inferior in the past, and now it is psychologically bothersome to change positions with it. The Turks, on the other hand, proved their superiority in battle from the very beginning. (Presumably, this has nothing to do with the fact that the Ottoman Turkish empire had collapsed by the beginning of this century, and that now the Arabs have very little relationship with Turkey).

Of course, all this Arab hostility to the West must have something to do with some of the other mental ailments that were mentioned before, such as the Arab’s lack of time sense, (in this case, not knowing that 400 years is more than 100 years), or what another (Western) social scientist has called

"the Arab's infatuation with ideal forms" to the point that he confuses between the real and the ideal.²³ "Arab thought," the author adds, "tends more to move on an ideal level divorced from the Procrustean bed of reality. Arab speech likewise tends to express ideal thoughts and to represent that which is desired or hoped for as if it were an actual fact in evidence..."²⁴

It is true that Arab thought may not always be realistic, but this is true about all underdeveloped societies. Underdevelopment itself is symptomatic of the lack of a scientific outlook. Even the so-called Western culture is still far from ridding itself of pre-scientific concepts (the "national mind" being only one of them). Trying to blame Arab hostility to the West on the odd structure of an abstract mind, while blinding oneself to the objective disadvantageous position of the weak nations in their relations with the greater powers does not really hit "the Procrustean bed of reality".

Placing Arab culture (traditional) on an opposite pole from the Western (Israel, we presume, being its outpost in an Arab wasteland) does not differ at all from the supposedly polarized mind of the Arab. To Patai, the West seems to have a monopoly on science, technology, literacy, scholarship, basic individual freedoms, nationalism, democracy and the welfare state, while Arab culture represents stagnation, ignorance, familism, religiosity, superstition, etc., an antithesis to everything good the West represents. The problem does not stop there. It is envisaged that the Arab mind is so dominated by these traditional values that it will be prevented from acquiring many of those desirable "Western" qualities. The Arab is pictured in that awkward position where every step he takes toward progress, even by trying to obtain literacy, he is forced to take from its sole possessor, the West, and one can imagine what this would do to Arab pride. The Arab may be able, according to this hypothesis, to accept some of those Western innovations that do not interfere with his basic values. So, while some changes are possible, others are out of the question.

The author is of the opinion that the Arab culture is closer to that of the East than that of the West, and that the two cultures are "characterized by widely divergent positions"²⁵, and we can conclude that "never the two shall meet."

Aside from the fact that this is a parroting of the colonialist ideology of another era, and apart from its attempt at converting the Arab-Israeli

conflict into a Western-Arab conflict, this is a static view of human societies. It fails to conceive of societies as passing through various stages of development. Western societies have not completely moved out of a traditional stage, nor are all Arab societies as traditional as the author seems to think. While it is true that Arab societies are still more dominated by religious or pseudoreligious creeds, Western societies are still far from being secular and scientific. While Arab societies can generally be described as familist, so can the rest of the underdeveloped world, including large parts of the West itself (i.e. Greece, Spain, Southern Italy, large parts of the Southern United States, etc.)

The so-called traditional values of any society, have never prevented its acceptance of innovations that would improve the quality of life. Not many years ago, many communities in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states thought of the radio as the work of the devil. Now these same communities not only run their own radio and television stations, but they have built thousands of modern schools for their children, universities, hospitals, and scientific research institutions. Some of their young women who were veiled only a few years ago are now getting university education, and are being sent on government fellowships to universities abroad. These societies have not suddenly become as modern as Western societies, but it can be said that they have accomplished within about thirty years what has taken the West several hundred. (This statement should not be taken as a glorification of any particular people. At this stage of human development, this is to be expected from any society that gains the opportunity, since the material developmental ingredients are already available).

Patai should be given credit for not believing that the East is "immovable" as some earlier Bible scholars used to think, when they tried to show how Arabs were still living in the same way as in the days of David and Jesus. He does admit that changes have occurred, but adds that these have been minor. Every innovation that occurs, we are told, "is only in the direction of return to the original pure perfect state of religion."²⁶ This way Patai does not score much higher than the Bible scholars.

Such an image of societies belongs to the idealistic Weberian-Parsonian school of social science, where permanent cultural values are supposed to be at the helm, and at the top of the hierarchy of social controls.²⁷ In order for the society to be innovative, it is emphasized, it must possess "innovation-oriented values". Those societies with "traditionally-oriented" values will reject any innovations that conflict with their basic values, and to Patai, the Arabs are one of those unfortunate people. .

Conclusions:

The above essay has attempted to focus on the most common weaknesses in the application of the "national character" concept to the scientific study of social behavior. While not all such studies may contain exactly the same defects encountered in our illustrative case, they usually cannot escape a number of them, since they are all based on the same false premises.

It can be concluded that the concept is unscientific, and it is usually described, even by those who adopt it, as "elusive", "protean", and "pre-scientific."²⁸ Description of nationality traits is usually based on superficial limited observations, often by strangers not familiar with, or knowledgeable of the culture or language of the people they are portraying.²⁹ Such portrayals become even more inaccurate and mixed with prejudicial fantasies when offered by members of any enemy group. Aside from the inaccuracies of the collective personality type offered, such traits are treated as permanent attributes, as independent variables to be used as explanations of other social behavior, even on the international scene, as was illustrated in the case of Arab behavior towards Israel. The mystical belief in peculiar national traits, even when these are empirically present, prevents the search for the scientific theory of why they are present. The scientist is usually satisfied by simply identifying them, or giving a one-step cause-effect explanation, blinding himself to the fact that such traits may not necessarily be peculiar to one group or nation, and that they would result whenever similar experiences are met by any other group. A "national character" approach may thus stand as a barrier, an easy way out of the exploration and deep understanding of the complex processes of man's continuous interactions with the human and non-human universe, and how the latter affects the former and vice versa. The approach may easily ignore, for example, how the physical environment, the climate, the wealth or poverty of the national resources, the way people are forced to earn a living, their contact or isolation from the outside world, their stage of technological development, the power configurations and relations within the society, the kind of ideology propagated by the more powerful groups, the status of dependence or independence, peace or war, the historical experiences with other forces, etc., all complex processes that affect the personalities within groups as **human beings**, regardless of their nationality or race. The "national character" approach, in other words, stands as a barrier to the development of a social science that strives towards the objective understanding of social phenomena. Even a social scientist who, himself, has contributed a great deal to studies based on the "national character" concept writes the following:

“With very few exceptions, the available studies of modal or group personality unfortunately suffer from several defects which make them poor evidence in support of **any** systematic proposition. As a rule they are not designed to test any theory or validate any model.”³⁰

Even analyses using the concept of the “modal personality” which is supposed to detect the most frequent patterns in a statistical distribution of certain personality aspects within a group do not usually explain how the frequency of such aspects discovered through the application of the few traditional psychological tests (i.e., T.A.T., Rorschach, the sentence completion test, etc.) are necessarily typical of the group studied, let alone the whole nation or region. And yet, some of these studies assume a scientific stance to the degree that the tests carried out on human beings sound much like studies done on viruses or electrons, things we cannot see, hear or touch, but which we can study only through the phenomena they exhibit in laboratory tests. It has become traditional in this type of study, when the analysis fails to achieve any tangible results, to call for further research, and to claim that the whole idea of carrying out the study had been to “stimulate further research.” It is as if we will eventually find something that does not exist if we only keep looking hard enough.³¹

Often, and particularly in those studies emphasizing the psychological personality make-up, the concept may become so static and abstract that it examines the mind in a vacuum, i.e., in isolation from its social and physical environment. Even when it is admitted that the “national character” is bound to change over time, it is claimed that such a change is too slow to be discernible.³² This usually means that the analysis must go on as if such a change is not taking place. Since we are looking at the mind as an abstraction without examining its interactions with its environment, how would it ever be possible to explain changes occurring within it when we do not really understand its internal processes? When it is assumed that certain basic values that are supposed to have been entrenched deep in the national psyche for hundreds of years, it is no wonder that it becomes mysterious when it is discovered that changes do occur. Even when the mind is seen as having been affected by certain environmental situations, the emphasis is usually on the early childhood experiences. Quite often it appears as if all interaction with the outside world and all further human learning and development has ceased since then. Thus the character of millions of people, it apparently seems, is mass produced, like pages in a printing press, by the way they were raised and handled at that early stage in their life.

When minds are looked at as pure souls in this manner, it is no wonder that the barriers between them become "psychological", and their conflicts become clashes between contradictory "cultures". One group clashes with another because, somehow its "character" was printed in such a way so as to repulse the other. Even a conflict as obviously material as the Arab-Israeli conflict is portrayed as a clash between two opposing "cultures", between "modernity" and "traditionalism". But it can be easily seen that there is much more in common culturally between the Arab and the Eastern Jew than between the Eastern Jew and the European, and yet the alignment of forces does not correspond to the cultural affinity.

Once we realize that barriers between two peoples are not set up as a result of a natural repulsion between two pure finalized "minds", it must become clear that Arabs, like Persians, other Asians, Africans, or Latin Americans, are not afraid or jealous of "Western culture" per se. They would like to obtain many of the material comforts and adopt many of the ideas and efficiencies of all advanced countries. The fact that they send thousands of their children to Western institutions for study every year shows this to be the case. What they (Arabs and others) are hostile to is the way some Western powers literally rob them of their natural and human resources, impose oppressive and backward rulers on them, support settlers to occupy their land by force, discriminate against their people, and use ultra-modern weapons for mass murder, instill beliefs in their heads that they are members of inferior races (of course this word is no longer fashionable) or culture, and that it is in the nature of things that they should be dominated by a superior race or culture, all this while preaching democracy, human rights, freedom, and the right to self-determination. A hostility to this Western face is not a product of a "national character", but a natural biological human reaction.

NOTES

1. Hans Kohn, **The Idea of Nationalism**, Collier Books (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967), P. 3.
For other words on the subject of nationalism, refer to the following:

Karl W. Deutsch, **Nationalism and Social Communication** (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1967).
Anthony D. Smith, **Theories of Nationalism**, Harper Torchbooks (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).
Barbara Ward, **Nationalism and Ideology**, College edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1966).
2. For a detailed study of the nationalistic German ideology, see
George L. Mosse, **The Crisis of German Ideology, Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich**, The Universal Library (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964).
3. Alex Inkeles, "National Character" in **Comparative Politics, Notes and Readings**, ed. by Roy C. Macridis & Bernard E. Brown (Homewood, Ill: The Dorsey Press, 1968), P.P. 36-44.
For other sources on the concept of "National Character", refer to the following:
Ralph Linton, "The Concept of National Character" in **Personality and Political Crisis**, ed. by Alfred H. Stanton & Elliot Aronson (New York: The Free Press, 1951).
Alex Inkeles and Daniel Levinson: "National Character: The Study of Modal Personality and Socio Cultural System" in **Handbook of Social Psychology**, ed. by Gardner Lindzey and Elliot Aronson (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1969).
4. That the "democratic personality" is ideal rather than concrete is not usually denied by the promoters of such a personality themselves. For example, Inkeles writes: "The problem of defining anything as broad as the 'democratic character' may be much like the problem of locating the Manchester economists' 'economic man' who Unamono somewhere described as 'a man neither of here nor there, neither of this age nor another, who has neither sex nor country, who is in brief merely an idea - that is to say a 'no-man'". **Ibid**, p. 38, 39.

5. Raphael Patai, **The Arab Mind** (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1976).

For a mild critique and a review of the literature dealing with the socio-cultural aspects of the Arab Israeli conflict, prior to Patai's book, see

Benjamin Beit - Hallami, "Some Psychosocial and Cultural Factors in the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A Review of the Literature." **Journal of Conflict Resolution**, XVI (April, 1972), 269-280.

6. **The Arab Mind**, p. 18, 19.

Related to this relation between the "modal personality" and the "national character, see:

Lenon Melikian, "The Modal Personality of Saudi College Students: A Study in National Character." in **Psychological Dimensions of Near-Eastern Studies**, ed. by L. Carl Brown and Norman Iskonitz (Princeton, N.J.: The Darwin Press, 1977), pp. 166-207.

This study is based on "sentence completion tests" given to 125 college students in Saudi Arabia, only 83 of them being Saudis, the rest naturalized Saudis from other Arab Countries. It is hard to see how such a test composed of 42 sentences to be completed is capable of detecting a "modal personality" even of the Saudi Arab student of that particular college, let alone the "national Character" of the Saudi Arab, as it is interpreted.

7. **The Arab Mind**, p. 20.

8. **Ibid**, p. 31, 32, 213, pp. 59-65.

9. **Ibid**, p. 60.

10. Refer to any introduction to psychology text-book.

11. **The Arab Mind**, pp. IX - XIII.

12. **Ibid**, p. 32, 33.

13. **Ibid**, pp. 65-72.

14. **Ibid**, pp. 204 - 227.

15. **Ibid**, pp. 113 - 117.

16. **Ibid**, pp. 274 - 282.
17. **Ibid**, p. 1.
18. **Ibid**, pp. 156 - 163.
19. **Ibid**, p. 157, 160.
20. **the Crisis of German Ideology, Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich**, p. 4, 5.
21. **The Arab Mind**, p. 157.
22. **Ibid**, pp. 290-306.
23. **Ibid**, p. 164.
24. **Ibid**, p. 311.
25. **Ibid**, pp. 278 - 295.
26. **Ibid**, p. 280.
27. See, for example, Talcott Parsons, **Societies, Evolutionary and Comparative Perspectives** (Englewood-Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966).
 See also Seymour Martin Lipset, **The First New Nation**, Anchor Books (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967). In this work, Lipset presents a historical analysis of the U.S. based on the permanency of two American cultural values within whose contours all changes in American history have had to take place.
28. For example, see Kenneth W. Terhune, "From National Character to National Behavior: A Reformulation". **Journal of Conflict Resolution**, XIV (April, 1970) 203 - 263, particularly see p. 259. On the changeability and boundary problem, see p. 238, 239. Nevertheless, Terhune, like several others, after expressing serious doubts about the "national character" concept, goes ahead and attempts to use it as the tool of his analysis, and (unsuccessfully) explores its potential in understanding and predicting national behavior.

29. See, for example, Hans J. Morgenthau, **Politics Among Nations**, (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1964), pp. 126-133, where it is claimed, based on some reports of some American minister in Russia in the 19th century, that the Russian National Character is secretive and suspicious of strangers, traits which agree very well with the image of the Russian, as portrayed by the Cold War propaganda machine. Thus it is concluded that such a character of the Russian is a permanent one.
30. Alex Inkeles, **op. cit.**, p. 41.
31. For example, when Terhune, **op. cit.**, p. 258, fails to discover, after a grueling attempt, any reliable method by which the "national character" concept may be used to understand or predict national behavior, this researcher decides, like many others, that there is still need for further research since "whether national character has potential for predicting international political behavior is yet to be demonstrated".
32. **Ibid**, p. 237.

مفهوم «الشخصية القومية العربية» : دراسة تحليلية

د . فريد صقري

لمفهوم «الشخصية القومية» علاقة مباشرة بفكرة القومية أو مجرد الانتماء لأية جماعة معينة ان كانت قبيلة أو طائفة أو دولة أو مجموعة من الدول. حاول بعض علماء الاجتماع المعاصر ين استعمال هذا المفهوم في سبيل تفهم السلوك الفردي أو الجماعي عن طريق اكتشاف بعض الصفات المميزة لتلك الجماعة التي يودون دراستها.

يقدم هذا المقال في جزئه الأول تحليلًا موجزًا لتطور فكرة القومية والتي تنبثق في أساسها من النزاعات القائمة بين جماعة وأخرى. وهي فكرة تلعب دوراً مهماً كأيدولوجية سياسية تساعد على توحيد صف شعب معين بالرغم من الفروقات الطبقية (أو الطائفية أو القبلية)، أو في حالات أخرى قد تساعد فئة معينة في انسلاخها عن فئات أخرى. الغاية هي دائما الوصول الى الشعور بالانتماء الجماعي لدى الأفراد.

تتولد فكرة «الشخصية القومية» من النزاعات السياسية بحيث ان كل جماعة تواجه أعداءها ترسم لهؤلاء صورة سلبية مثالية بينما ترسم لنفسها صورة ايجابية مثالية. وهذا التناقض بين «شخصية قومية» ننتمي لها وأخرى عدوة نحاربها يساعد عادة على تبرير صراع قائم والتفاني في سبيل النصر ضد عدو مشترك. يجري ترسيخ هذه الصور المثالية المتناقضة بايحاء من القادة السياسيين عند الطرفين. ففكرة «الشخصية القومية» فكرة سياسية ولا يمكن تنقيتها من التحيز والذاتية.

يقدم المقال في جزئه الثاني مؤلفاً معاصراً نال شهرة وانتشاراً في الغرب تحت عنوان «العقل العربي» لعالم أنثروبولوجيا صهيوني يدعى رافائيل باتاي. وهو يقدم بحثه وكأنه حقائق علمية ثابتة، لكنه في الواقع انعكاس واضح للعداء العميق القائم بين الصهيونية والعرب. يمثل هذا المؤلف تجسيدا لكثير من العيوب التي