

Introduction

The Epistemology of an Ideology



Ex Post Facto

The Arab is backward; his part of the world is underdeveloped. These are cases of fact that no observant person can contest. . . . Following the war that pushed 1,000,000 of his people into homeless squalor . . . he has come to appreciate the liability of illiterate farmers and their unproductive farms; he admits the incompatibility of feodary and progress; he has noted the relationship of feudalism to ignorance, poverty to feudalism, foreign control to poverty and ignorance to foreign control.

Bootstrap: Jordan Valley Development Project

This quote is taken from a 1953 United Nations Development Program project pamphlet. It associates the dispossession of the Palestinian people in 1948 with their “illiteracy” and “ignorance” and simultaneously negates their historical and territorial identity as Palestinians. So the assumption then goes that they are (only) Arabs whose circumstances must be attributed to their own failure. Although the pamphlet erases the history and politics of their dispossession (that is, Zionist aggression), its intention is “sympathetic” to the plight of the Palestinian people, promoting UNDP’s mission to promote education in the camps, where Palestinian refugees happen to end up as “the result of war.”

“Feodary,” “ignorance,” and the absence of “progress”—the passage resonates forcefully with the advent of a new Caesarism of the U.S. State Department following September 11, 2001. In addition to the conquest of Afghanistan, the global “war on terror,” and the American invasion of Iraq, the Bush administration eagerly adopted the Likud Party’s platform vis-à-vis the Second Intifada and the Palestinian people. Yet the shared political worldview of the Republican and Likud parties, Sharon’s courting of President Bush, and Sha-

ransky's seduction of Vice President Dick Cheney can only be given so much credit.¹ Rather, the foreign policies of the United States government concerning the Middle East are embedded in a specific ideological history that is reiterated faithfully as historical fact by a brigade of mainstream political commentators and journalists. Among others, former ambassador Dennis Ross, Daniel Pipes, Bernard Lewis, William Kristol, Charles Krauthammer, Farid Zakaria, and Thomas Friedman, who won a Pulitzer for news commentary in 2001, disseminated the key points on which U.S. foreign policymakers would religiously regurgitate from September 2001 to the present.

While this study does not intend to engage these ideologues or U.S. foreign policy, the vocabulary and formulae upon which their arguments lay are the subject of this study. In brief, they purport that Arabs have failed to develop a significant "civil society," to develop democratic institutions, expand the economic private sector, and permit basic and widespread political and civil rights. In short, Arab states, both "with or against" the United States as George W. Bush might say, have been unable to fully realize "modernity." From this failure, the "Arab peoples" have not enjoyed the benefits of globalization and therefore resent the transformations that it has brought. Consequently, the Arab populace transmute this resentment into an irrational dislike of America, American culture, and "American democracy." Rather than examining American foreign and economic policy, these analysts have faulted the Arab intelligentsia for blaming the West, Zionism, and colonialism for contemporary social ills and political maladies. Hence, Arab intellectuals are complicit with the corruption of their leadership because they refuse to question their own social, political, and cultural prohibitions and irrationalities. Such analysis by post 9/11 American pundits attests to either an ignorance of political history or a strategic omission of historical fact in the service of a political agenda. Even a cursory glance at readily available Arabic and English secondary and primary sources demonstrates that innumerable secular and nonsecular intellectuals, from the left and from the right, have engaged in the issues that these Anglophone commentators have mentioned from democracy to women's rights to economic justice.²

In reality, post-1967 Arab intellectuals quite visibly have struggled with the "failure" of their own societies and states, often implicitly agreeing with the developmental discourse found in the assessments of *Bootstrap*. The editorials in English-language dailies such as the *Daily Star*, *Kuwait Times*, *Arab News*, or *al-Ahram Weekly*, written by mainstream indigenous intellectuals, analysts, journalists, and activists, confirm such an observation. In fact, the discomfort-

ing verisimilitude between Arab and American criticism reveals the effects of the double colonizing move performed by the very epistemology that will be under examination in this book. Like in *Bootstrap*, intellectuals from Constantine Zurayk, Sadiq Jalal al-‘Azm, and Nadim Bitar to Hisham Sharabi and Hazim Saghiyah might agree that the disempowerment of the Arabs cannot be separated from their cultural and political illiteracy. For them, the loss of Palestine in 1948 and the completion of their dispossession in 1967 are manifestations of a deeper and more fundamental failure inherent to modern Arab subjectivity. These tragedies were a result not only of the corruption and authoritarianism of Arab regimes but also the “backwardness” (*takhalluf*) and “ignorance” (*jahl*) of their own societies. More specifically, they conclude that Arab societies failed to break with their traditionalist and conservative tendencies, preventing them from internalizing the spirit of modernity in its most positive, humanistic, and even revolutionary forms.

I have opened this study with the quotation from *Bootstrap* and a discussion of the ideologues of American Caesarism to demonstrate the predominance of the discourse of Arab failure and backwardness in the late modern and post-modern eras. “Failure,” “backwardness,” “ignorance,” “lack of unity,” and “the absence of democracy” and how they stand in contrast to Western “progress,” “civilization,” development, and modernity did not originate with Samuel Huntington or in the analysis of September 11. These terms have existed as key analytical rubrics for sociopolitical phenomena from Operation Desert Storm in 1992 back to the Arabs’ self-analysis of King Faisal’s loss to the French in Maysaloun, Syria, in 1920; the loss that led to the French Mandate in Syria and Lebanon.

The obsession of Arab and non-Arab thinkers, scholars, journalists, artists, and activists with “failure” is not a coincidence but rather a preoccupation that finds its roots in the very formation of modern Arab subjectivity during the Arab Renaissance or *al-nahdah al-‘arabiyah*. These terms predominate because they are an outgrowth of paradigms inherent to modernity and built on the dichotomy of progress and backwardness. This book does more than locate the origins of such a language of binaries. It also reveals that modern subjectivity—the subjectivity underlying Arab nationalist ideologies and their concomitant popular identities—arose out of paradigms of modernity that were generated and reconstituted by intellectuals, literati, and activists of all confessions during the nineteenth century. The epistemology upon which modern identity would rest, I assert, became the very intellectual quicksand for the Arab world’s confrontation with Western colonialism and imperialism, capitalist expansion, and individual state formation.

Age of Expansion and Transformations

While this present research is a study of the textual and epistemological roots of modern Arab subjectivity, one must remember that the writings of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Arab intellectuals during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries cannot be separated from the radical and vibrant historical transformations and developments of their day. Historians have traditionally marked Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 as the Arab world's dawn of the modern period. The French invasion, so it is asserted, is responsible for the introduction of the printing press into the Arab world and familiarizing Egyptian intelligentsia and noblemen with French scholars, generals, officers, and bureaucrats. But, moreover, the occupation had brought Egypt and later Greater Syria directly into the rivalry of competing interests between France and England. Discussing the role of competing groups or salons of organic intellectuals in the rise of the proto-bourgeoisie, merchant classes in eighteenth-century Egypt, Peter Gran has forcefully debunked the myth that Napoleon's expedition jolted the Arabo-Islamic world out of a cultural, economic, and social slumber.³ Likewise, attempts to reorganize various Ottoman institutions as early as the reign of Sultan Selim III (1789–1807) clearly demonstrate that the impetus to “modernize” was an internal, political, and uneven impetus that had preceded intensified European economic, political, and military intervention into the Ottomans' domain.

Even preceding the Crusades, the region was accustomed to doing business with the West. Waxing and waning over centuries, the nature of that commercial and cultural relationship changed by the nineteenth century. A growing number of French, British, Russian, American, and Austrian consular officials began to appear in the Middle East. The majority of these consular representatives simultaneously worked for companies with specific commercial interests in the region. Occasionally weakening the power of the traditional urban merchant classes that Gran discusses, France, Russia, and England began to develop patron-client relationships with minority communities in the Arab world. This policy made confession and ethnicity a prominent socioeconomic issue because it enfranchised some portions of formerly Christian Arab and Armenian peasants in the Empire, while also dispossessing others.

Europeans' economic need determined much of their political policies. France's lack of trading routes into Africa and the Mediterranean motivated them to occupy Algeria in 1830, where they dismantled Ottoman rule and established control well into sub-Saharan Africa. By the 1840s, the migration of

French colons had begun. Direct rule of Tunisia would follow in 1881 and Morocco in 1912. Likewise, Aden in Yemen was occupied by the British in 1839 to facilitate trade to the Subcontinent and secure control of the India Ocean. Their base in Yemen allowed them to gradually assert their influence over the Persian Gulf, which would serve them well in Iraq and Iran at the beginning of the twentieth century. Yet Egypt would be England's dominant entrepôt to the Arab world.

Upon ejecting the French from Egypt, Muhammad Ali, the Ottoman wali of Egypt, gradually gained complete control of Egypt through a program of bureaucratic and military modernization.⁴ During the rule of his successors, who would become known as the Khedives, investment such as the cotton industry, the Suez Canal (1869), and the railway entrenched British interests and influence deep into the "semi-autonomous" province. Isma'îl Pasha (1862–79) indebted Egypt to such a degree that by the 1870s British and French control of its economy was assumed. In 1882, Great Britain bombarded and occupied Alexandria and established de facto direct rule over Egypt after crushing the 'Urabi Revolt—a rebellion supported by many of the intellectuals under investigation in this study.

While France and Britain successfully commanded North Africa, their influence in the Levant was equally significant, particularly through the intensity of their economic activity. Lebanon's, for example, had been completely transformed with the rise and fall of the silk industry in the nineteenth century. Beirut's growth not only transformed the political economy of its environs but also affected adversely ports and merchant cities such as Sidon, Tripoli, Akka, Tyre, Aleppo, and Damascus. The rapid and drastic economic changes eroded the traditional feudal oligarchy, but also gave rise to a new bourgeoisie and petit-bourgeoisie. These economic changes coincided with, or were responsible for, seminal social and cultural developments in Syria. If the actual implementation of the Tanzimat in the Arab provinces is in question, the ideological effects of this Ottoman reform movement undoubtedly grew deep roots in the soil of Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine. The intellectuals, literati, entrepreneurs, and activists responsible for establishing many of private schools, presses, and industry in Greater Syria, would define an identity and class culture to confront the challenges that modernity seemed to hold.

Though this broad historical overview clues us into the context of the literature and writers under scrutiny in this book, the process of redefining identity vis-à-vis a torrent of local and global changes is not exclusive to the cultures and societies of South West Asia. Similar activities were occurring throughout

much of the world in the like-minded reform, independence, and literary movements of colonial India, Iran, Philippines, China, and Meiji Japan. Speaking of a similar inscription of colonial presence in South Asia, for example, Homi Bhabha reveals how such a process goes beyond an explicitly material dimension that has been examined so rigorously by South Asian subaltern scholars, most notably Ranajit Guha.⁵ That is, the “reformation” of self and society during the colonial encounter was an ontological as much as materialist phenomenon. If the discourses of colonialism, progress, and capitalism were hegemonic in their ability to exploit and subjectify, Bhabha shows that these discourses articulated by colonial bureaucrats, metropolitan writers, travelers and missionaries were also anxious and indeterminate, hence vulnerable to subversion. “Colonial presence,” he states, “is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference. It is a disjunction produced within the act of enunciation as a specifically colonial articulation of those two disproportionate sites of colonial discourse and power: the colonial scene as the invention of historicity, mastery, mimesis or as the “other scene” of *Entstellung*, displacement, fantasy, psychic defense, and an “open” textuality.”⁶ More specifically, Bhabha is concerned with how this hegemony is enunciated through the “English book”; how the discourse of the colonizer is riddled with the tensions of its own contradictions and violence, thereby haunted by its own ambivalence. At the same time, the language and form of the book continue to maintain an authority that poses itself as an unquestionable epistemological fact. The insights of Bhabha and other insightful scholars of the colonial condition help our minds grapple with the endless productions of the metropolis. Their efforts uncover the disciplinary practices that enact the metropole’s exploitive material control of the colonial subjects but also the discursive hegemony over them.

Returning to Arabic as the primary site for the production of knowledge, this study, in contrast to many scholars of postcoloniality, focuses on how “signs taken for wonders” or signs of mastery were naturalized endemically by a class of intellectuals before direct colonial intervention. We will see how the formation of a new Arab identity was constructed through experimentations in language, rhetoric, and of course literature, that is, through writing practices in the era of capitalist and imperialist expansion. More specifically, I have chosen a handful of prominent literati and reform thinkers whose work simultaneously aims to enact an autonomous Arab subject and society while also producing the discursive terrain that would confirm Western “superiority.” The ambivalences and contradictions that consequently appear at the heart of the ideologies of

Arab identity have been subsequently neglected, reconciled, or glossed over by historians.

Historiography of Arab Nationalism and Identity

If the history of the Arab world occupies the quiet background of this study, its historiography stands in its path. The historiography of the Arab world has generally ignored discursive phenomena as a determining historical force in favor of material, political, and ideological developments. Consequently, it approaches modern Arab identity either as a historical fact or an ideologically generated myth. That is, the question of Arab identity has been linked a priori to pan-Arabist national identity and political ideology. Bernard Lewis garnered much popular attention as a scholar of the Middle East. His “scholarly” prescriptions differ little ideologically and methodologically from his most recent pedestrian and opportunistic *What Went Wrong*.⁷ For example, he asserts that the concept of ethnic identity was alien to the Arabs along with other ethnicities in Southwest Asia during the premodern era: “Descent, language, and habitation were all of secondary importance, and it is only during the last century that, under European influence, the concept of the political nation has begun to make headway. For Muslims, the basic division . . . is that of faith, of membership of his religious community.”⁸

As Edward Said has shown us, such a statement serves the West’s need to articulate a determining set of criteria that aid it to identify and “understand” the Arabo-Islamic world. Like many of his expansive claims, Lewis’s assertion lacks evidence in the historical record. In this case, the statement is erroneous not because the concept of an ethnically defined nation-state existed previously. Identity based on nation-states is a modern phenomenon in the East like the West. We do know, however, that the access to power, resources, position, and rule in the classical period was determined by ethnicity, descent, wealth, and local origin as much as faith, as was the case in medieval Europe. That Mamluk rule in Egypt was based on Turkic ethnicity and military pedigree seems to be an explicit example of the role of politics and ethnicity in determining who holds secular power.

A more nuanced example is the Abbasid *shu‘ubi* debate, which pitched Persian and Arab cultures against one another. This debate tells us that local, ethnic, linguistic, and familial pedigree specifically determined selfhood and socio-political community precisely in the way that runs contrary to Lewis’s supposition. I would propose, furthermore, that the *shu‘ubi* debate was ensconced in

the very notion of Abbasid imperial rule. That is, the first two centuries of Islam were not defined by the coming together of disparate peoples under the banner of one homogenizing faith. Rather, the dynamic period was characterized by the jockeying for political, social, and religious dominance of Islam by various communities, which were informed precisely by ethnicity, locality, and descent if not politics and economy as well.

Lewis's ideologically loaded presupposition is that national identity inevitably manifests itself in a logical if not etiological desire for a nation-state. He is not alone when he conflates the notion of the nation-state with the notion of selfhood. Just as mainstream and state-sponsored historians have projected nationalist enunciations onto premodern Arab history, Lewis unoriginally equates diverse nuances of classical Arab subjectivity anachronistically with modern Arabism. This historical muddying collapses the contradictions and complexities presented to us by several centuries of Arabo-Islamic history that span over an equally diverse land mass and sociocultural environments. While his scholarship retains little weight in the academy, Lewis shares a historical method with countless historians, social scientists, and public policymakers of his generation, who hope to understand the modern Arab "mind." This crudely political understanding of history and identity underlies the historiography of the late Ottoman period in general, which is obsessed with how and when "the Arab street" started to publicly express a collective desire for self-determination. Consequently, the categorizing of all cultural, political, and intellectual acts as pro- or non-Arabist has confused the study of the period to the extent that many researches have been unable to distinguish between primary and secondary scholarship, between constative and performative statements, between polemics and history.

The most prominent example of this is the fact that George Antonius's *Arab Awakening*, which will be briefly discussed in Chapter Two, enframes the study of Arab identity. As the works of C. Ernest Dawn, Sylvia Haim, and Zeine Zeine attest, Antonius's book has served as a catalyst for the revision of the historiography of Arabism.⁹ Over time, this revisionist scholarship has been challenged or supported by scholars such as William Cleveland, Rashid Khalidi, Philip Khoury, and Hasan Kayali.¹⁰ All of these scholars have questioned the empirical reliability and veracity of Antonius, calling attention to ideological factors that might have influenced the objectivity of his work and the validity of the historical data that it provides. Responses to Antonius have led scholars to focus on statistical and quantitative data. For example, they have examined the number of participants in nationalist cadres prior to the First World War, such as *al-*

Fatat and *al-‘Ahd*, or the number of subscribers to political journals such as Muhammad Kurd Ali’s *al-Muqtabas* or ‘Abd al-Ghani al-‘Uraysi’s *al-Mufid*. These historiographical avenues are fascinating but seem to me to be misdirected. Few would disagree that *The Arab Awakening*, despite its weaknesses and explicit political agenda, is an interesting secondary source. With this consensus, the value of Antonius’s work should be found not in its trustworthiness as a secondary source but in its eloquence and clarity as a primary source. Albert Hourani recognized this when he stated, “*The Arab Awakening* has a literary merit of a high order. It is written in an excellent narrative style, precise, vivid, highly colored, at times moving.”¹¹

In *The Emergence of the Modern Middle East*, Hourani provides another valuable but overlooked insight. The analysis of Arabism as an ideology, he states, is missing from examinations of *The Arab Awakening*.¹² The shortcomings of the historiography of Arabism seem to lie here. Antonius’s detractors are correct in identifying his work as biased. However, its ideological tenor is the source of its rhetorical power. Therefore, scholars, both Arab and Western, have failed to understand *The Arab Awakening* as a manifesto of selfhood, that is to say, as a metaphysical and epistemological phenomenon. Therefore, I am proposing that Arab nationalism must also be understood as arising from a series of discourses on subjectivity. Seen as a primary source, we appreciate *The Arab Awakening* as a text that *enunciates* the archetypal Arab self-view. In it, Antonius eloquently presents a post-*nahdah* zeitgeist. We understand the text’s form and content as replete with the representation that the Arabs hoped to communicate to the Great Powers during a time of Zionist entrenchment in mandatory rule in Palestine. On a less calculating level, *The Arab Awakening* is a final product of an epistemological tradition where competing aspects of national selfhood had been rehashed painstakingly and worked into a coherent sense of modern identity.

By closely examining some of the works from the pantheon that Antonius immortalized, this present work suggests that this epistemology of the national identity, so inspirationally presented in *The Arab Awakening*, is antecedent to the articulation of Arabism as a full-fledged ideology or national movement. This assertion addresses Ernest Dawn’s contention that Arab nationalist sentiment, and therefore the modern conception of Arab selfhood, was an exclusive outgrowth of Islamic modernism. Those who deny this, he says, “write of Arab nationalism without Arab nationalists, of a movement without participants.”¹³ The fiction and nonfiction of these prenatal movement intellectuals—Christian, Muslim, and Jewish—will show us that the ideological utterances of

subjectivity inherent to Arabism anticipate the citizen-nation configuration. More simply said, we will see that the possibility, or what Mohammed Arkoun might call *la pensée*, of Arab nationalism is preceded necessarily by a specific epistemology; an organization and regime of knowledge that was shared by “Christian secularists” and “Islamic Modernists,” Arab Ottomanists and Egyptian nationalists alike.¹⁴ Nationalism, however, is only one expression of a selfhood that takes form in multiple cultural productions and sites. As the Young Ottoman movement shows us, expressions of national identity did not necessarily mean that this identity aspired exclusively to independent statehood. The selfhood that became the stuff of modern Middle Eastern nationalisms was not ready-made. Nor was it an a priori fact originating in some kernel of authenticity just waiting to be resuscitated by intellectuals and activists. Neither was this selfhood completely contrived or mythical, with no connection to historical materialism or preexisting consciousness that had to be recoded and reinterpreted in the light of the modern era.

Modernity and Authenticity

Contemporary Arab intellectuals such as Abdallah Laroui, Muhammad ‘Abid al-Jabiri, ‘Aziz al-‘Azmah, ‘Ali Harb, and George Tarabishi have recognized the tension between the authenticity, modernity, and construct of Arab selfhood.¹⁵ While avoiding many of the pitfalls inherent to questions of Arab identity, many of these brilliant critics have failed to confront the limits of the epistemology of modernity. They state that Arab thinkers rely reverently on their modern intellectual forefathers. This reverence leads them to accept misreadings, which fail to break archaic paradigms of selfhood.¹⁶ As a result, Arab society, they assert, has failed to internalize humanistic notions of modern civil society or to form cultural renewal in its own terms. For example, Hisham Sharabi contends that Arab intellectuals, particularly secular intellectuals, failed to articulate “a genuinely independent critical and analytical discourse in which the problematics of identity, history, and the West could find effective resolution.”¹⁷ This reply is predicated, however, on the prevalent assumption that modern Arab identity could be separated from the dominant epistemology that it developed during the colonial era. Or, it presupposes that intellectuals could, in some way, have rejected European hegemony and formulated a sense of self that was separate from the West’s domineering presence.

Sharabi is not alone in the pantheon of equally prolific and committed Arab intellectuals who reproduce the myths of modernity. In *Al-Naqd al-dhati* (Self-

critique), written in the wake of the 1967 war, Sadiq Jalal al-‘Azam is faithful to this messianic modernity. Arabs have failed, he believes, because they have faltered at the level of thought and practices. Repeating a familiar chant, he states that they have failed “to absorb the fundamentals of modernity, its science, technology, and institutions.”¹⁸ He concludes that “the inability to admit that ‘you (Arabs) have failed’” indicates the absence of a self-critical nature and will-to-progress that arise from humanistic secularism. This denial of the true principles of modernity led the Arabs to the disastrous defeat in 1967.¹⁹ More insidiously, we find this same prism in the works of Fouad Ajami, particularly *The Arab Predicament*, or Bassam Tibi. Disproving the assertions of the aforementioned Western pundits, Arab critical thinkers, from the right and left, often concur that the Arabs have not progressed because the intellectual and political class never properly internalized modernity’s true political and philosophical esprit de corps.²⁰

This present study rejects these assertions. Modernity undoubtedly has had uncompromising force in Arab society, polity, and culture because it is inseparable from the very epistemology of its selfhood. A review of works by various turn of the century intellectuals or twentieth-century nationalists will confirm that this epistemology is common to several competing discourses of Arab subjectivity; discourses as various as Islamic Modernism, Christian secularism, Romantic nationalism, to even the Salafiyah movement. Indeed, two generations of intellectuals established an epistemological continuity between the generations of Jurji Zaydan and that of al-‘Azam and Sharabi. Salamah Musa is precisely one of those intellectuals whose imprint can be found on Sharabi and ‘Azam’s generation. As a early secularist and proto-socialist, his belief in modernity is sustained throughout his long intellectual career. For example, in 1962, he opens his memoirs with this vignette.

I saw the nineteenth century through the eyes of a child. I saw it free of complexities, wearing nothing of the inventions of the twentieth century. . . . The traditions of the nineteenth century—if not the many preceding centuries—remained static until the beginning of this very century. . . . I have ridden on a donkey from the Cairo railway station to ‘Aabin and I lived in Zagazig when street lamps were unknown.²¹

Negatively, the imagery is rife with the modern. Musa conjures up a vision that represses signs of modernity. In painting such a portrait, he omits the predominance of radically new forms of communication, transportation, economy, and thought that had reached even the Egyptian countryside. By the late 1880s,

for example, the foreign-dominated cotton industry ran deep into rural Egypt; British troops bombarded Alexandria and occupied Egypt; and the Khedives bankrupted the country through an enormous national debt. Moreover, paging through any 1890s volume of the journal *al-Hilal*, one can find letters from regional towns up and down the Nile. But for Musa, like his intellectual progeny, modernity is conspicuous and proves itself only in the most ostentatious manifestations. That this “proof” did not always exist at an immediate visible level attests, for him, to his culture’s “backwardness.”

Qualifications and Clarifications

Before proceeding further, lexical and semantic clarifications of the nomenclature of reform (*islah*) are necessary. Reformer and littérateur ‘Abd Allah al-Nadim comments that “if an Arab loses his language, he loses his nation and his religion.”²² This nexus of language, self, and identity interests us as do the problems, ambiguities, and contradictions that this knot presents. The question of language is essential to *al-nahdah* because it creates a specific causal chain that binds the paradigms of reform, a chain upon which reform can be enacted.

Terminology such as cultural success (*najah*), decrepitude (*inhitat*), stagnation (*jumud*), progress (*taqaddum*), and civilization” (*tamaddun*) may be misunderstood. I am not asserting that the Arabs were actually culturally decrepit or socially backwards during or due to the Ottoman era. Nor am I so idealistic as to contend reactively that the Arab world flourished during this period in ways that it previously or subsequently had not. I use the inflammatory terms “decrepit,” “native failure” and “lack,” “European superiority,” and the like, not as terms to describe an a priori, indisputable cultural and social factual condition of the time. These terms are the lexicon that intellectuals used in ascribing the ontological, subjective, cultural crisis that they were diagnosing. Therefore, I do not delimit success/failure, presence/lack, and progress/backward dichotomies because I feel that they accurately represent the true cultural, social, and subjective states of Arab culture. Rather, they are the epistemological condition endemic to the reform platform of the nineteenth century as imagined and envisioned by thinkers, activists, literati, reformers, poets, and merchants of the day. For the intellectuals in question, this lexicon describes cultural facts and serves as antipodes between which the subject must move in his/her journey towards reform.

This study is admitted lopsided. Intellectuals of Lebanese and Egyptian origin based in Beirut and Cairo make up a lion’s portion of this research. There

were dynamic reform movements in Algeria, Tunis, and Morocco as well as fascinating intellectual and academic debates in Baghdad, Sana'a, Aleppo, Damascus, Haifa, and Jerusalem. While I examine a handful of generally forgotten literati, I have chosen to concentrate on the pantheon of "pioneers" as delimited by the historiographical tradition.

Likewise, many of the literati are Christian Arabs and all, save Labibah Hashim, are male. Indeed, women's journals increased at the turn of the century. Their weighty influence in creating a generation of women intellectuals, writers, editors, educators, and activists cannot be underestimated. While women's rights was central to reform discourses, the national ideal that these male reformers cobbled together was essentially male just as the civil order and public space which they imagined was masculine. I would hope to see further examination of how women's personal and national identities were constructed by writing and artistic practices, but also how these identities were navigated, mediated, or displaced by their male counterparts' vision of modernity.

I anticipate that some might take issue with my choice of the terms "Arab," "native," "indigene," and "subject." First of all, the term "Arab" or "Arab subject" may seem anachronistic or even misplaced to some, considering that intellectuals referred to themselves as Syrians, Egyptians, "Easterners," and Ottoman citizens as often as they identified themselves as Arab. As is the case with using terms like "West," "Western," and "European," I acknowledge that "Arabs" is a generalization that fails to represent the intracultural, interregional, confessional, and class diversity within the Arab world. Despite the pedantic and rhetorical deployment of this terminology, they are not monolithic terms.

My emphasis on the "subject" demands a brief explanation that would help in abating any undue misunderstandings. When I speak of the Arab subject, the native subject, and the national subject, I am speaking not of concrete citizens or stereotypes but of representation of a subjective ideal that these nineteenth-century intellectuals were depicting. If nothing else, this ideal was a yardstick by which reformers set their goals and gauged their failures. If identity represents a synthesis of cultural, historical, and social components, subject includes discursive, ontological, and psychological fields. As Deleuze might say, the subject refers to a conceptualization of an indigenous self who is an assemblage of several competing, often contradictory historical and cultural, religious and secular discourses. In this vein, "Arab subject" represents a typology.

This Nietzschean understanding of typos and tropes underlies the project at hand. The book begins with a meticulous reading of a handful of foundational texts by Butrus al-Bustani and his peers in chapters 1 and 2, in hopes of unfold-

ing the structure, contradictions, and ellipses within epistemological core of competing positivist, secularist, and romantic discourses. The arduous rigors of this reading are fruitful as they lay out the plane upon which this study, and indeed Renaissance itself, transpires. In chapters 3 and 4, the analysis opens up in speed and the number of texts in question. In these chapters, I discuss how literary productions articulated, reformulated, and struggled with the paradigms of reform vis-à-vis the looming cultural and political hegemony of the Western powers in Egypt and the Levant. In this variety of engagements, new schools of thought, aesthetics, and cultural productions were generated. All were bound by the problematics introduced in the first two chapters. In chapter 5, we will see that the Arabo-Muslim competency and rationality had become the dominant cultural issue between East and West, as exemplified by the debates between Ernest Renan and Jamal al-din al-Afghani and Farah Antun and Muhammad ‘Abduh. I reveal how the very criteria of universal reason had become inscribed within the nativist discourses themselves. Finally, the topoi organized through the writing of fiction and fiction appears in their most plastic and popular form, that of the historical novel. In chapter 6, I read the historical novels of Jurji Zaydan to understand how the subject splits, once again, into performative and constantive subjects in narrating a vision of the past and present that is both modern and “authentic.”

The intellectuals, writers, reformers, activists, and cultural producers under examination in this study are not foundational because their works still resonate in the canon of Arabic literature, culture, and thought. Some have been forgotten, and their works remain obscure. Others exist as often referenced but rarely examined titles and names that form the backdrop for unquestioned literary, political, or intellectual traditions. The texts are foundational because of the language, the discourse, and the episteme that they articulate and represent. The authors in question, as Foucault has said, “produced not only their work, but the possibility and the rules of the formation of other texts.”²³ The paradigms that they tumultuously forged served as the basis of the rationalist discourse of Arab subjectivity during the Arab Renaissance and consequently a romantic backlash. But also the epistemology that they animated remains at the unconscious of a variety of subjective positions for Arabs that would be adopted in the following hundred and fifty years.