A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS ON THE ROLE OF CULTURE AND LANGUAGE IN THE EARLY PHASES OF NATION BUILDING IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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ABSTRACT

As most of the nationalism studies indicate, language and culture are among the crucial elements of the nation-building process. The revival or construction of the national language and culture played a significant role in the formation of national identities of 20th century's Syria, Lebanon and Israel as well, and these processes find their origins in the late 19th century. Syrian intellectuals developed a multi-faced cultural awakening pattern called as *Nahda*, in which the Arabic language had a pivotal place. Lebanese Maronite elites planted the first seeds of Phoenicianism, which saw the ancient Phoenicia as the genuine origin of Lebanon. This meant that the Lebanese had their unique identity, which is separate from the Arabs, and this brought the efforts to have a new historiography. At the same period, the pioneers of cultural Zionism – Jewish intellectuals who did not live in the region at the beginning – made huge efforts for the revival of Hebrew language, and this paved the way for the efforts of the political Zionism. Despite significant differences and unique aspects, these three currents had also many points that were similar to each other and to other nation-building efforts in the world, and they all played significant roles in the shaping of new nation-states.

Keywords: Nation-building, National language, Nahda, Phoenicianism, Zionism

ORTADOĞU'DA ULUS İNŞASININ ERKEN SAFHALARINDA DİL VE KÜLTÜRÜN ROLÜ ÜZERİNE KARŞILAŞTIRMALI BİR ANALİZ

ÖZ

Pek çok milliyetçilik çalışmasının işaret ettiği üzere, dil ve kültür, ulus inşası sürecinin hayati unsurları arasında yer alır. Ulusal dilin ve kültürün canlandırılması veya inşası, 20. Yüzyıl Suriye, Lübnan ve İsrail'inin ulusal kimliklerinin oluşumunda da belirgin bir rol oynamış olup, bu süreçlerin kökenleri 19. Yüzyıl sonunda yatmaktadır. Suriyeli aydınlar, *Nahda* adı verilen, Arapçanın merkezi bir yere sahip olduğu, çok yönlü bir kültürel uyanış modeli geliştirmiştir. Lübnanlı Maruni elitler, Antik Fenike'yi Lübnan'ın gerçek kökeni olarak gören Fenikecilik'in ilk tohumlarını ekmişlerdir. Bu görüş, Lübnanlıların Araplardan ayrı kendi özgün kimliklerinin olduğu anlamına gelir ve bu da yeni bir tarihyazımı çabalarını beraberinde getirmiştir. Aynı dönemde kültürel Siyonizm'in öncüleri, yani başlangıçta bu bölgede yaşamayan Yahudi aydınlar, İbranicenin canlandırılması için devasa çabalar sarf etmiş, bu ise siyasi Siyonizm'in çabaları için zemin oluşturmuştur. Aralarındaki belirgin farklılıklara ve özgün boyutlarına rağmen bu üç akımın birbirine ve dünyadaki öteki ulus inşası çabalarına benzeyen pek çok yanı da olmuştur ve her üç akım da yeni ulus-devletlerin şekillenmesinde kayda değer roller oynamıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ulus inşası, Ulusal dil, Nahda, Fenikecilik, Siyonizm

INTRODUCTION

In a significant part of the academic and non-academic narratives about the region, the First World War is considered as the starting point of configuration of the New Middle East, and the shaping of the region's political map is frequently related to external events, such as the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 which divided the region and paved the way for British and French influence zones for the post-World War period, as well as the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which signifies the promising of a "Jewish homeland" in Palestine by the British government. While these processes certainly played a significant role in the formation of today's Middle East, a reductionist approach that relates this formation only to external political interferences should be avoided. Indeed, modern Middle East is also formed through the ideas of the intellectuals of the diverse communities.

In this article, three important currents that have a fair weight in the formation of the 20th century's Middle East region and its nation-states will be elaborated. These currents have many characteristics that are similar to the cultural awakening patterns of several European nations. In this framework, we will study *Al-Nahda,* Phoenicianism, and early modern Zionism, which played significant roles in shaping modern Syria, Lebanon, and Israel respectively. These three currents are chosen for several reasons. First, they brought political effects in regions which are geographically close to each other, which can be even considered as one and same region: *Bilad al-Sham*, or Levant. Second, despite significant differences, they have many common points as well, and these points are parallel to what we define as the "universal pattern" of nation building in this article. Third, these currents are also rival to each other, if not mutually exclusive. Following the investigations throughout the work, we claim that all of these currents, which are developed by pioneers and then reached out to relatively larger masses, have played significant roles in the shaping of new nation-states, regardless of whether those pioneers had that goal or not.

It is true that all these currents require detailed elaboration, and already the related literatures are large and ever enlarging. The originality claim of this article comes from its effort to *compare* them and to elaborate each of them primarily (but not solely) through the perspective of centrality of national language. This is why it would be beneficial to briefly talk about the role of culture and language in the nation-building processes and

to place the issue in a larger theoretical framework. Following this first part, the mentioned three currents will be analyzed in turn, and finally the comparison will be made in the conclusion part.

NATIONALISM, NATION BUILDING AND CULTURE

Nationalism is essentially a modern concept. Although it had some older origins, the nationalist phenomenon basically emerged with the French Revolution of 1789 and then spread to other parts of Europe and the world. It would become a sort of dominant ideology in the 19th century's Europe, and it would be largely adopted by the non-European world in the 20th century as part of "late modernization". Basically, nationalism is a political phenomenon, and its aim is to create a national power over a territory. This may take shape in various ways: a nationalist movement might struggle to get independence from a multi-ethnic empire or replace the monarchy with the "national will". In both cases, the country is to be ruled by the nation itself. But a crucial requirement of this process is to define the nation and to make all the segments of the society feel that they are a part of it. Especially for the communities who did not have a state or a state-like entity in a previous period, that nation must be sometimes "built" by the political elites and intellectuals. This nation-building process includes many elements, ranging from a new historiography to the revival of the language, discovering or inventing national myths, creating national ideals, educating the people, indoctrinating them with national values, and so on. A crucial part of all these efforts is reviving or building a national culture.

Culture and organization are seen as two "raw materials" of social life by Ernest Gellner, who sees nationalism as a principle that considers the similarity of culture as the main social bond (Gellner, 1997: 3). Similarly, Stephen J. Lee thinks that one of the characteristic features of nationalism is an awareness about a natural homogeneity among the members of the society in terms of language, culture, and social customs (Lee, 1988: 306).

Indeed, a common language is an indispensable part of nation-building processes. According to Sue Wright, national language plays a series of roles in these processes, and they can be classified under three main categories. First of all, the national language plays a useful role, and it functions as a tool of communication that makes participation in political and economic processes possible. Secondly, a common language paves the way for the construction of a common culture for the nation. This also has

a symbolical dimension: knowing and using the national language is a part of the definition of belonging to the nation. Using the language indicates that the individual is a part of the society, whereas refusing it is schismatic and goes against patriotism. Thirdly, the claim of being a separate nation can be supported by putting in evidence that the language of the nation is different from the languages of neighbor communities (Wright, 2004: 42).

Making a detailed theoretical discussion about national language and culture is not among the aims of this article. But it should be underlined that these two elements are crucial and indispensable for a national identity, which is a major focus point of all modern nationalist movements. Obviously, those movements are born in quite different contexts and their aims are not always identical. A nationalist movement may search for independence; it may struggle to form a new state or restructure the existing one, or it may simply look for changing the status of a national community inside the current political framework. As it will be seen in the following parts, the makers of Syrian *Nahda,* the Christian Maronite elites of Lebanon who developed Phoenicianism, and the avant-garde figures of Jewish Zionism had quite different agendas. Nevertheless, the cultural awakening patterns developed by these three groups had many common points. All of them followed a more or less universal model and looked for an identity that would be common for the members of the society and that would differentiate the society from the others. This would be accompanied by some secondary elements of nation building, like a reference to real or supposed ancestors. Evidently, schools would play a crucial role in this making of national culture as well.

THE ARAB RENAISSANCE: *NAHDA*

The second half of the 19th century witnessed the rise of an Arab cultural awakening, or an "Arab Renaissance", in Ottoman Syria (and at a secondary level, in Egypt). A leading scholar of the field, Bassam Tibi, asserts that the Arab nationalism emerged in that period because of the "globalization of the international system", underlining that the European paradigms had reached almost all parts of the world, and that the new nationalisms were the result of the interactions at international level (Tibi, 1991: 12). Although Tibi points in later parts of his work that Arab nationalism was not identical with Western nationalisms, it is still possible to draw parallels between the European pattern and the Arab Renaissance. This process, called *Al-Nahda* (Awakening), had four subsequent major steps, all of which played significant roles in the construction of a modern

Arab identity: opening new schools, emergence of publishing activities, translation of foreign books into Arabic, and finally a revival of the Arabic language.

In effect, the first steps of schooling in Arab provinces of Ottoman Empire are seen in the second quarter of the 19th century. Especially 1830s, which correspond to the autonomous rule of Mohammad Ali Pasha in Egypt and the subsequent occupation of Ottoman Syria by his son, Ibrahim Pasha, brought important developments in this sense. This coincided with missionary activities in the region as well. In effect, the Lazarist Fathers opened a college for boys in Aintoura, a predominantly Christian town to the north of Beirut (which was then a part of greater Ottoman Syria) in 1834. The same year, American missionaries transferred their publishing machines from Malta to Beirut. This was followed by the opening of an all-girls school in the same city by Eli Smith and his wife, and the creation of a new and modern school program in Syria by Ibrahim Pasha for primary schools (Antonius, 1938: 35).

Following the Mohammad Ali & Ibrahim Pasha occupation that lasted for almost one decade, the Ottoman state took back the control of Syria and Egypt in 1840, but missionary activities continued after that date as well. By 1860, various missionary groups had opened thirty-three schools throughout Ottoman Syria; they had almost one thousand students in total, and one-fifth of them were girls (Antonius, 1938: 42). Also, local Ottoman Christians had opened many new schools in the second half of the twentieth century, and a significant part of them was with the support of France. Searching for a balance, the Ottoman administration opened its own schools instead of closing the ones opened by foreigners. The first step was the opening of the primary schools, but it gradually evolved into a chain of schools that included higher levels. The peak point of this process was the opening of Damascus Medical School in 1903 and Damascus Military School in 1904. Thus, this period witnessed a leap in the level of education of Syrians as a result of various factors.

The second important source of *Nahda* was the emergence of new publishing activities. The first significant local journal was *Hadiqat al-Akhbar,* published in Beirut from 1857 on, by Khalil al-Khouri, who was a member of the Christian middle class of the city. This journal would play a significant role in spreading the ideas about a regional patriotism and identity among the Syrians (Zachs, 2005: 88). Three years later, Syrians

met with *Nafir Suriyya,* published by Boutros al-Bustani, which also played an important role in the intellectual life of Syria. These two journals would be followed by a series of new ones. Although they did not have a clear political stance, they did have an important function for the construction of the Arab identity since they produced written texts in Arabic language and put them in circulation.

This rise in daily and weekly newspapers coincided with another sort of publishing activity, which was the translation of foreign books into Arabic. This included the works of famous French writers such as Balzac, Stendhal, Flaubert, and Hugo. Although the first wave of translations was mostly limited with the field of literature, it also paved the way for importation of concepts from Western languages, first and foremost French, to Arabic, and for a quest of Arabic equivalents of modern concepts. In later phases of *Nahda*, political texts were translated into Arabic as well, and they added a new dimension to this cultural awakening. *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadance* of Montesquieu was one of them: Rifaa al-Tahtawi, an Egyptian Muslim who translated the text and wrote a foreword for it, would be the one who imported the concept of "fatherland" to Arabic language and Arab intellectual life (Tibi, 1997: 87). A significant point worth being underlined is that the Arabic book production in this period also allowed many female Arab scholars to access "knowledge previously restricted to men". (Hanssen & Weiss, 2016: 15) This process even witnessed the emergence of preliminary Arab "feminism" when figures like May Ziadah and Zainab Fawwaz joined *Nahda* with their writings that elaborated not only literature and philosophy issues but also gender equality and reform problems (Farah, 2002: 48-49).

Al-Nahda process saw its full blossoming with the scholarly works made in the fields of Arabic language and history. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, figures like Taher al-Jazairi, Abd al-Qader al-Maghribi, and Khalil Mardam managed several works, including preparation of Arabic grammar books, examination of Arabic proverbs, analysis of roots of Arabic words, and compilation of older products of Arabic literature. Also, modern Arab historians wrote many books about Syrian cities, Syrian architecture, and social life in Arab provinces. On the other hand, during the 1860s and 1870s, literary clubs and scientific societies became active in Beirut – which was the main cultural center of greater Ottoman Syria – and they served as centers for discussion for both literary and political issues. The emphasis on the Arabic language throughout these activities

led, as William Cleveland points out, "naturally to a heightened awareness of the cultural identity of the Arab community" (Cleveland, 2004: 130).

Another important figure in this process was Gurgi Zaidan, a Beirut-born Christian writer, who elaborated the subject of the Arabic language very frequently in the magazine *Al-Khilal* that he published from 1892 on. One of the most striking articles about this subject, entitled "History of the Arabic Language" was published on May 9, 1893. According to Zaidan, language was a growing body like all the other living bodies, and the place of the words in this "body" was similar to the place of burgeons on a tree. Words were coming into existence, living and dying naturally. The Arabic language had developed its existence throughout all the periods before and after Islam, by leaving aside the worn and useless words and by assimilating new terms. Zaidan also developed these ideas in a book, which took its final form in 1904 under the title "Arabic Expressions and Philosophy of Language." (*Al-Alfâz al-Arabiyya wa'l-falsafa al-lughawiyya*) (Dupont, 2006: 264). Gradually, the emphasis made to the Arabic language gained a direct political implication. Especially Boutros al-Bustani saw the education in the Arabic language as a centerpiece for the unity of Syrians and the civilization. According to him, Ottoman Syria was already the "Tower of Babel" of the religions, and it should not become a Babel of languages as well. The Arabic language, and education which is given by that language, would be a unifying force for various communities living in the region (Hourani, 1983: 102). This is why Albert Hourani considers Al-Bustani as the person who lays the foundations for the modern Arabic language. But all these efforts also led the Arab intellectuals to confront the social reality of their community. In the Introduction part of a recent work on *Nahda* which brings new perspectives following the way opened by Hourani and other classical scholars, Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss indicates that "Nahda's philological modernization also bore within it the sense of cultural loss and sacrifice occasioned by generalized ignorance and malfeasance" (Hanssen & Weiss, 2016: 18)

In the early 20th century, *Nahda* would become an even more politicized phenomenon, and it would fuel the decentralist Syrian-Arab political movements of Second Constitutional Monarchy period of the Ottoman Empire (1908-1918). The political debates between the Unionist government and the Arab reformers who fought for local autonomy go beyond the scope of this study. But it is possible to say at least that this political Arabism finds its origins in the cultural Arabism which had

developed throughout the decades that precede it. Another point worth being underlined is that, although the first seeds of the Arab cultural awakening were sown by foreign forces, it would be essentially developed by local Syrians themselves (together with some Egyptians, as we remarked), and this included different segments of cultural elites, such as Christians, Muslims, journalists, historians, and even women.

PHOENICIANISM AS THE CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF LEBANESE EXCEPTIONALISM

Modern Lebanon is generally seen as an "exception" in the Middle East. Although vast majority of its population is made up of Arabs, this tiny country has a unique political culture and a relatively isolated position, by which it is partially separated from the rest of the Arab world. This can be explained by various factors. Firstly, it is the first entity that went out of the *Pax Ottomana* in the 19th century, when the region of Mount Lebanon (*Jabal Lubnan*) got autonomous status in 1861 with an agreement between European major powers and the Ottoman state, and from this time on, Lebanon started to have its own (and by some ways isolated) political life (Hakim, 2013). Secondly, with the creation of Greater Lebanon by Henri Gouraud in 1920, the country had a Christian-centered political life, under the "protection" and hegemony of France, and this also played a significant role in the creation of Lebanese exceptionalism. Finally, this exceptionalism had deeper ideological roots, which had emerged *before* the French mandate regime. In the following parts, we will elaborate on this ideology, which is known as "Phoenicianism".

In essence, the ideology of Phoenicianism claims that the original roots of Lebanon are found in ancient Phoenicia, and thus the Lebanese have their own identity, separate from the Arab world that surrounds them. This concept, which was developed by Christian Maronite elites of the region had a double function: surpassing or neutralizing the Arab-Islamic influence in the country on one hand and integrating with the world by underlining the cosmopolitism of Phoenicians on the other hand (Moeller, 2010).

The current, which was in one sense a way of protecting the Lebanese identity against the rising Arab nationalism in the same periods, coincided also with a new historiography. In the 19th century, some Lebanese intellectuals and historians such as Tannous al-Shidyaq claimed that the Lebanese Christian Maronites were not Arab in fact: they had their

origins in another community called "Mardaites", which were settled in the region by Byzantine Empire against the Arab-Islamic invasions in the 7th century. The underlying meaning was that the Maronites, who were the largest group in Lebanon, were not even Middle Eastern. Although there was a certain difference in terms of implication, both the narratives about Mardaite and Phoenician origins had a similar function: they created a myth about Lebanese people, giving reference to non-Arab origins, and underlining heroism and a golden age (Atlıoğlu, 2014: 187-197).

Phoenician reference was also related with the emergence of archeological and scientific findings concerning this civilization in the second half of the 19th century. An important figure who played a role in conceptualizing Pheonicianism was the famous French orientalist Ernest Renan, who had participated to the expeditionary force sent in 1860 by France to Syria. Renan later wrote a long volume entitled *Mission de Phénicie,* in which the archeological findings were described in detail. The conclusion part of his book had also a politico-cultural dimension: he claimed that the conflict between urban (Phoenician) and the nomad (Arab) was the key of whole history of the region; that barbarism won with the victory of Islam; that the backward Badawi was still dominant in the region; and that Lebanon could nevertheless protect its essence thanks to its natural defense conditions (Renan, 1864: 837).

The current of Phoenicianism had thus firstly emerged in the late Ottoman period, but it would take its final and highest form in the French mandate period (1920-1943). While Université St. Joseph in Beirut – which was added to Greater Lebanon by the French and turned into the capital city of the new country – became the most important cultural center of the country, the history and geography books written by Gabriel Levenq, Rene Moutarde, Ferdinand Toutel, and Jacques Eddé were used as textbooks in Lebanese schools. At the same period, Phoenicianism became a sort of official state ideology, and even a new theology was created, claiming that Adam and Eve had descended from Heaven to Lebanon, that Noah's ark was made of Lebanese cedar trees, and that Jesus had come from Palestine to Lebanon to spread his creed (Khuri, 1990: 157-158). Finally, the efforts to separate Lebanese identity from Arabism were seen in some debates about alphabet, when famous writer Said 'Aql proposed leaving the Arabic alphabet and using instead Latin alphabet with Phoenician origins (Atlıoğlu, 2014: 223).

In summary, the current of Phoenicianism and other trends that accompany it did their best to build a Lebanese identity which would be separated from the Arab identity, and this coincided with the emergence of new myths that depicted the Lebanese not only as a unique community but even as the center of the world in some instances.

MODERN ZIONISM AND ITS CULTURAL COMPONENT

Modern Zionism is another ideological current that is typical of the period in which it was born. This current, who aimed – and managed – to create a Jewish nation-state in Palestinian territories was not a religious movement at all: indeed, most of its avant-garde figures were secular, even atheist people, although the religious narratives about "Promised Land" played a certain role in publicizing the movement (Chomsky & Papper, 2015: 125). This is also quite in parallel with the nation-building pattern in Europe in the same periods when we keep in mind that elites of many other nations – from the Scottish to the Romanian – used real or fictitious narratives about Great Ancestors and religious or semi-religious myths as part of building their nationalist programs and indoctrinating the large masses (Thiesse, 2001).

In fact, one important point, which made Zionism a "modern" current, is that it separated itself from the traditional Jewish views about returning to Palestine in the distant future. Although the Judaic creed claims that they are the chosen people of God and that they will return to Promised Lands one day, most of the Jewish clergy also believed that the "exile" (meaning spreading of the Jews to different parts of the world after 70 AD) was also a part of the divine fate, and the Jews who would return to *Eretz Yisrael* one day would also be at forefront of the emancipation of all human beings. In other words, God had chosen Jews for this emancipation in His big plan (Tessler, 2009: 16). In addition, it was only God who would decide the timing of return. This would happen after the arrival of Messiah, and if people would try to construct a homeland in Palestine before that time, this would be a violation of the contract between God and people, and evidently going against His plans (Tessler, 2009: 19-20).

When Theodor Herzl published his famous book *Judenstaat* in 1896 and when the First Zionist Congress convened in Basel city in 1897 declared the aim of creating a Jewish state in Palestine, this was a clear disengagement from the traditional religion-based Jewish stance, and religion would play only the aforementioned "publicizing" role for the Zionists. In addition,

modern Zionism was less fed by the legacy of religious Zionism than the legacy of Jewish enlightenment and nation-building efforts of the 18th and 19th centuries. At this point, it will be useful to take a glance at this older Jewish cultural awakening that preceded and contributed to the political Zionism at the turn of the 20th century.

Indeed, the efforts to define the Jewish community as a national community instead of a religious one, as well as the efforts to construct a cultural identity, emerged in Europe in the same period where the continent met with Enlightenment and nationalist ideas. The Jewish enlightenment, called *Haskalah,* was born in Germany in the late 18th century and then spread to other European countries. *Haskalah* gave special attention to language and education issues, and in a larger context, it included a belief in creating a cultural *modus vivendi* between Jews and the surrounding world and bringing about a change by this way (Tessler, 2009: 26). Almost in the same years, figures like Krotsmal and Smolenskin started to declare that Jews make up a nation in the modern sense and that they should get their national rights. In addition, a key element in Jewish nation-building would be put in the forefront by Rabbi Yehuda Alkalai in the 19th century: breaking from the Orthodox tradition which saw the Hebrew language as a sacred language that was not fit for daily life, Alkalai insisted that the key of reconstructing the union of Jews was to use Hebrew commonly (Tessler, 2009: 27-38).

The language issue was indeed highly crucial since most of the Jews were speaking the dominant language of the country in which they lived. One alternative for the Ashkenazi (major community of European Jews) was the Yiddish, but it was not a "national" language since it was under the influence of the German language, and it was spoken by only one segment of the global Jewish community. This is why the Jewish intellectuals found themselves in a heated debate about language in the 19th century. The Association for Jewish Culture and Science (*Verein für Kultur und Wissenschaft der Juden*), which was founded in Germany in 1819, made extensive works on the Yiddish language and they arrived at the conclusion that it was no more than a German dialect, and it could not be a fundament for nation-building. At the beginning, this was the idea of the minority among Jewish intellectuals, but gradually the idea of reviving Hebrew and making it a common language for Jews found more supporters.

Late 19th century witnessed the emergence of initial versions of what is called as the cultural Zionism with the efforts and works of Ahad Ha'am and Eliezer Ben Yehuda, among others. Born in 1856 in Russian Ukraine, Ahad Ha'am was in favor of the cultural revival and modernization of the Jewish people through the agency of a little intellectual elite. For Ha'am, a complete national life was involving two things: "First, full play for the creative faculties of the nation in a specific national culture of its own, and second, a system of education whereby the individual members of the nation will be thoroughly imbued with that culture, and so molded by it that its imprint will be recognizable in all their way of life and thought" (Troy, 2018: 107).

As for Ben Yehuda, he was a figure not only preaching the development of the Jewish culture through intellectuals, but also – and more importantly – playing a vital practice role for the construction of the Jewish national identity, which would reach the masses. Born in Russia in 1858, Jewish journalist Ben Yehuda went to Palestine in 1881 and committed his life to the creation of a modern language on the basis of ancient Hebrew, which was the language of Torah, but which had become a dead language throughout centuries. Ben Yehuda saw an explicit political implication in this effort: Yiddish was the language of slavery and exile, whereas Hebrew, which was now in process of being revived in the land of Great Ancestors, was the language of free Jews living in their "own" territories (Thiesse, 2001: 78). At the age of 22, one year before going to Palestine, he had said in a letter the following words: "All our efforts to make them appreciate the importance of the language to us, the Hebrews, will be of no avail. Only a Hebrew with a Hebrew heart will understand this, and such a person will understand even without our urging. Let us therefore make the language really live again! Let us teach our young to speak it, and then they will never betray it!" (Troy, 2018: 105).

Settling in Palestine was a crucial issue for Ben Yehuda, because he believed that the Hebrew language could be revived only by "returning" of the Jewish masses to what was considered as the fatherland: "let us increase the number of Jews in our desolate land; let the remnants of our people return to the land of their fathers; *let us revive the nation and its tongue will be revived, too!"* (Troy, 2018: 105). Ben Yehuda prepared a huge Hebrew dictionary by producing new words with original Hebrew roots, thus he both revived and created that language. And the Modern Hebrew would be obligatory in the Jewish schools opened following the

first Jewish immigration waves to Palestine in the late 19th and early 20th centuries; it would get its final victory when the British mandate authorities would recognize it in the 1920s as the official language of Palestine, having equal status with Arabic and English (Thiesse 2001: 79).

Before concluding, it should be noted that Ben Yehuda was also active in the publication efforts in Jerusalem, and these activities were among the constituting elements of the Jewish national identity, similar to what we have seen in the case of *Nahda*. The Jewish newspapers in late Ottoman Palestine were elaborating several issues, a great deal of which were about non-political issues, such as daily issues and urban problems. But especially the ones that appeared after the Ottoman Constitutional Revolution of 1908 such as *Ha-Herut* as well as Ben Yehuda's newspaper, *Ha-Tsevi* were engaged in political affairs, too. They even gave space to articles about Palestinian Arabs from a Jewish political perspective, and asserted, for example, that the Christian Arabs were "the worst enemies of the Jewish communities" (Dalachanis & Lemire, 2018: 333-345). In these ways, they significantly contributed to the construction of a modern Jewish national identity.

CONCLUSION

In this article, a general framework for three cultural awakening patterns that had direct or indirect political implications and that affected the emergence of the new Middle East in the early 20th century is given. To conclude, the common and differentiating features of these three currents will be underlined.

First, all the aforementioned currents belong to the same periods, and they emerged as part of the general modernization process in the region and in the world. This is why they share some basic characteristics of modern national(ist) currents and ideologies. As we underlined in the first part, language plays a crucial role in the creation of a national identity, and this role is clearly seen especially in the cases of *Nahda* and cultural Zionism. The language issue is more complicated in Phoenicianism, because it is impossible to put another language at the forefront for an isolation from Arabs since the mother language of Maronite Christians is none other than Arabic. This is why the only thing they could do was to propose a new alphabet, although this found few supporters. History is also another critical component in all these processes albeit in different forms and levels. Several figures of *Nahda* made works about the general

Arab history, and precursors of Zionism did not fail to make reference to ancestors' lands. And for the Phoenicianists, the works of history took the form of producing a new historiography and even a new theology.

The main differences that separate these three phenomena from each other can be found in their political implications and in the status of the elites that produced them. Although *Nahda* can be – and must be – seen, in a retrospective approach, as a pillar of the future Syrian national state, its vanguards most probably did not have the aim of having a Syrian state. Indeed, they were within the *Pax Ottomana* and what they developed was in fact a part of general Ottoman modernization. The elites made only a little faction of the larger Ottoman Syrian society, but different segments of this community were represented in the leading figures of *Nahda.* And finally, despite the fact that foreign forces played a certain role in this process, it was mainly the local elites who produced that cultural renaissance.

As for Phoenicianism, the case is quite different. It was produced by only one segment of Lebanese elites, namely Christian Maronites, who made up the majority of Lebanon in which many other religious and sectarian communities lived as well. They had a clear political aim, which was to make Lebanon separate from the Arab world that surrounds it. And while it was launched by local forces at the beginning, the process took its final and highest form under the support and protection of a foreign – mandatory – force.

Finally, modern Zionism and its cultural component were produced not by native people who lived in Palestine, but by European Jews who aimed to settle in that region and to create a totally new political entity (which would be, in final instance, a colonial entity) there. Also, they would reach their aims in later periods with the help of another mandatory force – in this case, Britain. And finally, the movement didn't represent all the Jewish elites, let alone all the Jewish people: it was the product of secular nationalist Jewish elites, who would separate themselves not only from religious leaders but also from the more moderate figures inside the European Jewish intelligentsia.

In sum, the three "awakening" patterns of Middle East region had important differences, but they all fall within one same large category. There's ground to claim that all these movements put the issues of language and culture at the center, and while they were initially supported by only a minority within their communities, they fulfilled a significant function in nation-

building, despite the fact that they were not necessarily in favor of a nation-state. That said, shaping of the 20th century's Middle East was certainly not solely the result of the efforts of these pioneers, and the foreign powers who had built mandate regimes in the Levant region had a certain role in these nation-building processes as well.

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