Int. J. Middle East Stud. **34** (2002), 781–783. *Printed in the United States of America*
DOI: 10.1017.S0020743802214087

NOTES AND COMMENTS

A RESPONSE TO ALI ABDALLATIF AHMIDA'S REVIEW OF *THE MAKING OF AN EGYPTIAN ARAB NATIONALIST: THE EARLY YEARS OF AZZAM PASHA, 1893–1936*

RALPH M. KHOURY

I thank Ali Abdallatif Ahmida for his thoughtful and generally positive review of my book *The Making of an Egyptian Arab Nationalist: The Early Years of Azzam Pasha, 1893–1936*, *IJMES* 33:4 (2001). However, I take issue with several of his remarks.

First, Ahmida says that "throughout" the book I remain "sympathetic" to "the kind of nationalism and the bourgeoisie that Azzam represents," and that it is "only in the last chapter" that I become "critical" of what I describe as "an effort to promote a self-exalting image for the Egyptian ruling class" (p. 420). I believe that a critical attitude toward the influence of class interests and perspectives informs my entire work. In speaking of Azzam's childhood I write that, for the Azzam family, Islam was a faith associated with hierarchical values and institutions that were accepting of the socio-economic structures that had made the rise of the family possible (p. 21). In analyzing the political culture of Azzam and other student members of the Hizb al-Watani, I write about the strong influence of the French Revolution but point out that this was not the revolution of the popular masses (p. 47). In discussing Azzam's participation in the Libyan national struggle, I note that his faith in what he called "the natural democratic qualities of the Arab peoples" was "openly elitist," inasmuch as these qualities were perceived, in his words, as being potentially "anarchic" unless they were "harnessed, shaped and educated by men of understanding"—that is, by members of the ruling classes (p. 169). And, in my discussion of Azzam's efforts in the 1930s to cultivate the British, the monarchy, and political forces drawn from the petit bourgeoisie, I speak of the need for Azzam and other members of the political elite to develop a strategy that would enable the Egyptian ruling class to negotiate between those to whom it was subordinate and those whom it dominated (p. 327). My concern about issues relating to class is made manifest at the outset of my work in a quote from Jacques Berque in which he remarks, quite accurately, that the Arab nationalists of the inter-war period combined, in "a characteristically bourgeois phenomenon," the "most ardent fervour, the most inventive spirit of intrigue, with loyalty to class and civic virtues" (p. viii).

Second, Ahmida refers to a quote from an interview I conducted with Azzam in May 1970 in which Azzam states that his sense of being an Egyptian and Muslim did not change when he began speaking of Arabism after the Ottoman collapse, but that his Arabism differed from "the bitter intrigue" of Sharif Husayn and his sons. Ahmida claims that this quote shows that, in the case of Azzam and the modern Maghrib, Arabism and Islam "are two faces of the same coin," that Azzam "considered himself an Egyptian, a Muslim, and an Arab nationalist," and that this has significance for scholarly debates about Arab nationalism in the United States, "which focus mainly on the Syrian, secular school of Arab nationalism as if it was the only trend in the region." If Ahmida wishes to claim that Azzam was a Muslim nationalist after the collapse of the Ottomans or that he thought of Muslim nationalism and Arab nationalism as synonymous, I would have to disagree. After the collapse of the Ottomans, Azzam felt that forms of political unity based on Islam would not work, either because they would have diffi-

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743802224083 Published online by Cambridge University Press

culty encompassing Christian minorities or for other reasons. I cite his comments to a Brazilian Lebanese newspaper in 1927 in which he claims that religious unity is not sufficient to unite peoples, as well as an interview given to me a day before the interview cited by Ahmida in which he states: "I believe that I turned to Arabism because there was nothing left, nothing strong. Islamism would not work" (p. 173). I would add that even if Arab nationalism in Egypt has tended to take on more of an Islamic coloring than it has in some other areas of the Mashriq, it is nevertheless wrong to assimilate Egyptian Arab nationalism to the historically much more Islamist Arabism of the Maghrib.

Third, Ahmida writes that my theory of nationalism is shaped by the ideas of the Marxist critic Frederick Jameson but that I cite liberal historians such as Jacques Berque and Albert Hourani without clarifying the reasons behind such use. I wonder why the relevance of these sources is unclear. I cite, for example, Hourani's interpretation of Toynbee's idea of "Rout and Rally" as an echo of the Winchester playing fields on which so many British officials may have developed their vision of the rulers of empire as a "school team" composed of warriors and administrators, and I wonder whether these officials may not have found a mirror image for this school team in the "bedouin" who created the first Arab empire. This is mentioned in a discussion of Azzam's relationship to British officials, a number of whom seem to have attributed his amiable qualities of "bedouin" origins. My use of Hourani and other "liberals," in this and other contexts, is surely compatible with materialist readings. Some "liberal" scholars have more to offer Marxists than many a Marxist.

Fourth, Ahmida writes that I approach nationalism from a materialist and critical perspective but that I focus on Azzam as a member of the Egyptian elite. He then asks whether it is possible to study nationalism today by focusing on the elite alone, and he suggests that the absence of non-elite actors encourages traditional Orientalist and colonial assumptions about Arab society. I will restrict myself to a few responses. First, a biography by definition concentrates on a single individual, no matter how much that biography seeks to relate that individual to larger realities. Are we to assume that a scholar with critical and materialist perspectives should simply refrain from writing the biographies of important elite nationalists? Second, my treatment of the attitudes and realities of the non-elite majority may not receive the attention that Ahmida would like, but this does not mean that these aspects do not play a major role in my analysis of Azzam's political thought and practice. I argue, for example, that Azzam's Arabism in the inter-war period is related to what Nazih Ayubi has termed a "conservative corporatism" that strives to restore the alleged harmony of pre-capitalist society by placing the process of peripheral capitalist development under the control of a ruling class that will satisfy some of the demands of the working class without letting them get out of hand. In this respect, the influence of new political organizations (Misr al-Fatat, the Muslim Brotherhood) played a significant role in supplying the pressure of the masses on which the political elite sought to draw but to which it also had to respond. I also try to relate "high" and "low" throughout my book by seeking to show how Azzam's developing Arabism reflected, in spite of the fact that it was strongly marked by ruling-class interests and perspectives, a truly indigenous system of meanings, values and identity that cut across class lines. This concern is manifested in my contention that a sense of Arab unity, based primarily on language and other shared elements, existed to some extent among the common people before the development of the Arab nationalism of Azzam's maturity. In my discussion of the attitude of Azzam's family to the Urabi revolution (Azzam's father did not support it), for example, I point out that a chiliastic Islam, and one that took an Arabist coloring, emerged among some of the rural rebels. In one village, ulama proclaimed that Muslim scriptures prophesized that the Europeans and Truks would be defeated; that Urabi would become king of the Arabs, including those of Syria and the Hijaz; and that injustice would be abolished.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743802224083 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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A REPLY TO RALPH M. KHOURY

ALI ABDULLATIF AHMIDA

I read professor Ralph Khoury's response to my positive review of his book. I found no new convincing argument to some of the questions I raised in my review, and hence I stand by it.

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