Iran and Egypt: Emotionally Constructed Identities and the Failure to Rebuild Relations

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Abstract

Nearly four decades after Iranian-Egyptian diplomatic relations were severed, the two countries are yet to restore them. This is a result of the predominance of certain negative emotional attachments embedded in Iranian and Egyptian identities, which have clouded their respective attitudes toward one another. Mired in resentment against Arabism, the national component of the Iranian state identity catalyzes a disinclination to resolve problems with Egypt; in addition, Iran's religious component carries resentment against Egypt as a state against Shia identification. The anti-western dimension of the Iranian state identity strengthens Iran's negative emotional attachment to Egypt as a country allied with the United States and recently reconciling with Israel. On the Egyptian side, the Arab nationalism as the defining feature of the Egyptian state identity dictates estrangement from Iran and reluctance to engage with that. These negative emotional predispositions shape Iran and Egypt's understanding of one another and, in the absence of pressing material interests, explain the continuous failure of the two countries to rebuild their relations.

Keywords: Egypt, emotionally constructed identity, Iran, pride, psychological constructivism, resentment.

Introduction

The political and diplomatic relations between Iran and Egypt severed after the victory of the Iranian revolution in 1979. As a result, bilateral trade as well as economic and cultural relations have remained rather limited. Egypt is among the few countries with which Iran has not been able to reestablish relations in the aftermath of the initial upheavals that Iran's foreign policy went through in the immediate years after the revolution. This fact gains more significance when seen against the backdrop of Iran's success to refurbish strained relations with other countries, including Saudi Arabia, which were also severed by the advent of the new political system in Tehran. Although political decision-makers in both Tehran and Cairo have occasionally talked about the necessity to resume relations, there has been no significant political incentives taken by either country. As a result, Iran and Egypt have failed to reestablish relations. In this paper, it is argued that the failure to resume relations can be best explained with reference to the imperatives of the Iranian and Egyptian emotionally constructed identities. In fact, in the absence of material obligations forced by the benefits that mutual relations entail, identity-related concerns and considerations could explain Iran and Egypt's failure to rebuild their relations. Such identity concerns are the result of emotions that play a part in the two countries' understanding of each other.

The above-mentioned hypothesis is based on the assumption that material security, political or economic necessities can direct states' relations irrespective of their identities. In other words, despite the fact that identity forms the bases of states' attitude to others and in the end defines states' relations as either cooperative or conflictual, the imminent security, political and economic necessities can give rise to the adoption of policies incompatible with identity concerns. For instance, two states can tolerate each other or even cooperate with one another with the

aim to evade confrontation or meet considerable economic benefits even when they are parts of conflicting global or regional blocs. In the case of Iran and Egypt, along with the absence of political relations, which are generators of interests-these interests, in turn, justify the continuation of relations- what keeps the two countries in adversarial positions is the existence of the Iranian-Egyptian conflicting identities. To advance this argument, in this study we examine the relations between Iran and Egypt as well as the way in which these two countries' identities are formed historically in response to emotions that direct their mutual understanding and confine their perception of one another in a circle of mistrust.

Iran-Egypt Relations: from Cooperation to Confrontation

Under the Pahlavi Dynasty in Iran, Iranian-Egyptian relations were not always stable and witnessed significant developments. The changes in the relations were responses to both domestic and international developments. Internally, until the monarchical system was in place in Egypt, the similarity of the types of governments provided strong bases for Tehran and Cairo to maintain their close connections. The ties between the two royal families strengthened further when Iranian crown prince Mohammad Reza Pahlavi married Fawzia, King Farouk's sister. Externally, the rise of the Nazi Party in Germany provided both Iran and Egypt with an opportunity to create a balance against Britain and reduce its interferences in their internal affairs. The anti-British campaign in both countries in the aftermath of the Second World War, brought Iran and Egypt even closer (Ahmadi, 1379 [2000 A.D]: 48). Although the Iranian oil nationalization happened in the Iranian port city of Abadan far away from Egyptian Nile, the crisis in Abadan had a significant impact on Egypt. "Egypt which was deeply involved in a struggle of its own with Britain over control of the Suez Canal, was a fertile ground for inspiration" (Israeli, 2013: 148).

486

After the 1953 coup d'état, which overthrew the Iranian Prime Minister Mosaddegh, the shift in the Iranian government and the return of the Shah to power put Iran and Egypt against each other. The tensions between the non-aligned Egypt and pro-West Iran of the Shah reached their peak in the late 1950s and left negative imprints on the future of the two countries' relations. The atmosphere of animosity between the two countries continued until the defeat of the Arab nationalists from Israel in 1967 and the gradual waning of the pan-Arab sentiments in Egypt. The death of Nasser, followed by Sadat's taking office was the ultimate factor that led to the improvement of relations between Tehran and Cairo. In the 1973 Arab-Israel war, Iran allowed the Soviet planes to cross Iranian airspace and deliver military assistance to Egypt. Iran also supported Sadat's initiatives to end the conflict between Egypt and Israel, most particularly in 1979 when the Camp David accords were signed between Cairo and Tel Aviv (Bahgat, 2009).

With the victory of the Islamic revolution in Iran, Shah sought asylum in Egypt and was under the ultimate support of Sadat until he passed away in 1980 (Pendar, 1388 [2009 A.D]: 341). From this time onward, Iran started to condemn Egypt over the Camp David accords and its recognition of Israel. Iranians were seeing in Egyptians' recognition of Israel a great sin, because it could mark a beginning for the gradual recognition of the Israeli state by other Arab countries. At this juncture, Egypt also began to accuse Iran of interfering in Arab countries' affairs by supporting the Islamic movements. The war of words between the two countries led, in the end, to the suspension of diplomatic relations in 1979 (Jafari Valdani, 1383 [2004 A.D]: 80). From this time forth, Egypt turned into a staunch opponent of Iran's foreign policy in the region, accusing Iran of expansionism in the Persian Gulf and calling for Arab countries' resistance against Tehran. Egypt also went to great lengths to contain the Iranian revolution. With the beginning of

the war between Iran and Iraq, Egypt stood beside Iraq and provided the Iraqi army with advanced arms paid by Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. It also revised the law banning service in foreign armies for its nationals and by doing so, paved the way for the recruitment of 186000 Egyptians by Iraq to fight against Iran. From an Egyptian perspective, a probable Iranian victory in the war, would not only strengthen and activate the Islamic movements, but would also disrupt the balance of forces in the region to Iran's advantage (Jafari Valdani, 1385 [2006 A.D]: 19).

The atmosphere of hostility between Iran and Egypt continued until the beginning of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, which alarmed Egypt and other Arab states over the uncontrollability of Saddam Hussain. The continuation of Iraqi aggression was similarly uncomforting for Iran and therefore the convergence of interests in cooperation against a joint source of threat led to the reduction of tensions between Iran and Egypt. This resulted in the reopening of the two countries' interest sections in 1992. The presidency of Mohammad Khatami in Iran saw a gradual and slight thaw in relations with Egypt. In 1998, Egypt, together with several other countries, co-sponsored Iran's proposal to declare the year 2001 the year of dialogue among civilizations (Abdelnasser, 2006). The resulting positive atmosphere was reflected in the softer political positions taken by the two sides concerning each other. A clear example of that was Mubarak's answer to a question about Iran's nuclear program: "we cannot speak about the Iranian nuclear program, which does not exist. The main danger is the Israeli nuclear program" (Soltani, 2000). However, any optimism to resume relations faded in 2008 when Iranian national television broadcasted a film named 'Execution of the Pharaoh," in which Sadat was referred to as a traitor. Egypt objected to this and in reaction, the Egyptian police raided the Iranian satellite channel Al-Aalam's office and confiscated its assets (Abdelhadi, 2008).

488

With the Egyptian revolution in January 2011, expectations to resume Iranian-Egyptian ties revived in Iran and the Iranian officials endeavored to facilitate a transition to a possible detente and a gradual resumption of relations. According to the Iranian president, Mahmood Ahmadinejad, "Iran and Egypt should act against their common enemies to meet their common interests. We would be proudly ready to give our experience to the dear people of Egypt. Egypt's glory is our glory and its development is our development" (BBC Monitoring Middle East, 2011). However, the optimism faded in the securitized and highly polarized Middle East when the developments in Syria proved to the Iranian detriment and the new Egyptian Islamist president Mohammad Morsi took position in favor of the Syrian opposition. This doomed any prospect for the improvement of Iranian-Egyptian relations under the Islamists short-lived rule over Egypt.

Iran and Egypt: Emotion, Identity and Failure to Rebuild Relations

As explained above, the relations between Iran and Egypt severed after Iran's revolution, and have not been resumed since. In the absence of political and diplomatic relations between the two countries, identity and ideational considerations have become predominant in the two countries' attitude towards one another, therefore have prevented the resumption of relations. In fact, the prolonged discontinuation of relations have undermined the significance of Iran and Egypt in their respective foreign policy priorities and stripped their attitudes towards one another of the logic for reestablishment and continuation of relations. In the absence of material benefits and necessities, the two countries have not seriously tried to rebuild their relations; any initiative to rebuild relations has thus lost cause and morale boost to be followed up in the shadow of lack of pressing material justification and opposing identities. In fact,

these identity considerations have formed the Iranian and Egyptian outlook to one another and therefore are the main causes for the failure of both sides to reestablish relations.

In general terms, identity is defined as "a mental construct that both describes and prescribes how the actor should think, feel, evaluate, and, ultimately, behave in group-relevant situations" (Chafetz et al., 1998: 8). Identity in this sense is understood as the product of historically developed emotions, and at the same time, reflects the emotions of that it is a product. The recognition of the role that emotions play in the conception of identity can best be captured by Psychological Constructivism, a term coined by Jacques Hymans (2010). According to constructivism, states' identity matters in foreign policy decision-making and in their international interactions. However, it is crucial to know that to understand a state's identity, the process of identity formation should be studied in a way in which the role played by emotions is addressed and investigated. In fact, without reference to emotions, understanding how identity affects foreign policy and the relations among states is rather obscure. In scientific literature, emotions are defined as coordinated responses to internal and external events that affect human organisms. Emotions are subjective experiences and have a wide range starting from very slight to very strong internal feelings. Emotional dynamics, as subjective states, are normally out of our control; we just recognize them as 'feelings' when they enter our consciousness. They, however, may remain in our unconsciousness as biases (Hall & Ross, 2015: 847-848).

The recognition of emotion as a cognitive affair enables us to bridge the gap between emotion and cognition. In this way, emotion and cognition are not two completely distinct types of human's perception of the environment. Contrary to the simplistic belief that emotion starts where rationality is failed,

emotion is present in both our rational and irrational behaviors. Robert Solomon and Martha Nussbaum believe that emotions are important types of knowledge and thought (Bleiker & Hutchison, 2008: 124). In recent years, empirical and neurological research has indicated that emotions and affect attachments engage in our decision-making through affecting certain parts of the brain. This fact suggests that politicians and political elites may decide according to their feelings about situations, phenomena and people. In these occasions, decisions are made about subjects not necessarily based on a cognitive analysis of subjects and situations, but simply in response to the feelings about them (Sasley, 2010: 690).

Emotions are best recognized at the individual level; however, in order to understand the way in which they affect foreign policy decision-making and the relations between states, the way they act in levels above individuals, including society and state, should be investigated. Emotions have social dimensions. The feeling of an emotion is personal, but it is conveyed through language and language is a collective agreement. Scholars in International Relations believe that the spread of emotions among people living in a state, and therefore its prevalence at the social level occurs when the concerns of a national group provide the basis for common feelings among all members of the state (Löwenheim & Gadi, 2008). As emotions are collective, they are historical too. As a result, they are not necessarily transient and can last long, spreading inter-generationally. Feeling of being betrayed or resentment can have different political implications for states, depending on the social context in which they develop. In fact, the emotional status of a state has a history of formation and reformation, which may result in its stabilization or transformation (Fattah & Fierke 2009: 70-73).

Such powerful emotions become a part of states' identities

over time. States define themselves in relations to others based on the feelings they have about them. This means that in order to clarify the impact of identity and ideational imperatives on the continuous break offs in Iran-Egypt relations, the two countries' emotionally constructed identities should be addressed and investigated. Therefore, in the following section, Iranian and Egyptian identities will be studied with reference to the way in which their constituting elements shape both states' perception of one another in a way that they are bound to a negative reading of the other's actions and intensions, which has ultimately given rise to both countries' inability to rebuild their relations.

i) Iranian Identity and Egypt

There have been considerable academic efforts to understand the Iranian identity after the revolution of 1979. Mahdi Mohammadi Nia refers to two dimensions in the Iranian identity: "The first dimension reflects the state identity that is a construct of the domestic discourses present in Iran, and the second dimension consists of the social identity that is a result of the Iranian international interactions". Hossein Karimifard distinguishes between pan-Islamism, pan-Shism and modernism as the main sources of the Iranian identity, while Suzanne Maloney names Islamism, anti-imperialism and the Iranian/Persian civilization as the main elements that form and influence the Iranian identity. Mohsen Milani gives equal weights to the Shia religion, Persian language and problems with the Western world as the main elements that contribute to the formation of the contemporary Iranian identity. These authors insist that there is a strong connection between the pre and post Islamic history of Iran when it comes to the construction of the Iranian identity. For Fred Halliday, Iran's identity is a composition of Islamism, Iranism (Iranian pre-Islamic culture) and the historical relation with the West, and Shireen Hunter underlines the competition between Iranian and Islamic identities in Iran" (Akbarzadeh & Barry, 2016).

492

The above-mentioned literature reveals that despite different interpretations of the Iranian state identity in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution, there is a relative consensus over the existence of the three elements of national, Islamic and Shia components in Iranian identity. For the sake of analytical ease, the two elements of Islam and Shia can be combined so that the Iranian state identity would be a 'religious nationalism'. In addition, the impact of the West, though interrelated with nationalism, should be seen as a strong constituting element of the Iranian identity. In this paper, our main aim is to illustrate the way in which the historical construction of religious nationalism in Iran has been tied to various emotions concerning Egypt (Arab nationalist and allied with the West), and has formed a political *other* for the Islamic Republic of Iran. The hypothesis is that the historical experience of Iran's relations with the Arab world on the one hand, and with the western countries on the other hand have given rise to the nurturing of certain emotions between Iran and Egypt. That, in the absence of material imperatives, explains the sustained discontinuation of the two countries' relations. The tendencies to de-familiarize a part of the Arab world and the West are reflected in the 'discourse of independence' as the dominant discourse in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The analysis of the discourse of independence demonstrates the way in which this discourse- as the basis for Iran's state identity- encourages standing against the West and opposing certain Arab states. The discourse of independence has been a dominant discourse in Iran for decades and grants Iran a role based on the perception of the Iranian identity as an independent state. Three anecdotes form the Iranian discourse of independence: first, the glorious Iranian past, second, the country's historical victimization in the hands of the invaders, and third, semi colonial/imperialist encounters that have led to Iran's dependence of foreigners in the past and explain today's underdevelopment of the country (Moshirzadeh, 2007).

According to the first anecdote, Iranians are among a few nations that can claim to have a traditional civilization, which dates back to thousands of years. Iran was once a large empire and a political entity with a rather strong leadership role in the pre-Islamic world. After the conquest of Iran by Muslims, the country once again revived itself during the Safavid Empire and became a major Islamic center of power. In this reading of the Iranian national identity, the Arab world as a culturally inferior *other* was a base for the demonstration of Iran's greatness and the high status of the Iranian civilization. In combination with the second narrative, according to which Iran is seen as the victim of foreign invaders (here Arabs), this narrative of Iran as a great civilization explains the emotions of self-pride along with resentment against the Arabs who invaded Iran and put it into a historical misery of superstition and religious prejudice (Karimi Maleh, 1375 [1996 A.D]: 24-25). The radical anti-Arab sentiments were strong in this era to the point that not only Islam, but the Islamic culture of Iran was also seen as ineligible to be the continuation of the glory and greatness of Iran's pre-Islamic heritage (Ram, 2000: 70-71). Nationalistic ideology emerged first in the writings of Mirza Fath-Ali Akhundzade and then Mirza Agha Khan Kermani in the time span between 1860 and 1900. Both described the pre-Islamic Iran as an ideal society that had seen all the possible human achievements and a lawful realm devoid of poverty and injustice. The end of this utopia is blamed on 'naked and hungry Arabs' who sprang out of the desert (Zia-Ebrahimi, 2014: 1042). This negative attitude towards Arabs continued throughout the Pahlavi era.

After the Iranian revolution in 1979, the romantic view of the Iranian past was modified through a compromise that was reached between the national and religious dimensions of the Iranian identity. In fact, the religious nationalism is the modified and balanced version of the Iranian identity so that its nationalism is maintained but would be purified from its

radicalism and romanticism. Despite this, the new Iranian nationalism is not devoid of all negative feelings towards the Arab subject, though this time it is more about Arabism instead of Arab people in general. In the post-revolution narrative, Iran is best known by its place in the Islamic civilization and not its pre-Islamic glory. However, this time, the two factors of Iranians' significant contribution to the Islamic civilization (pride and glory) and its non-recognition by the prejudiced Arabism (being disdained) when reducing the Islamic civilization to an Arab – Islamic one, revives the contradictions between being an Iranian and Arabism. Here, Egypt as the heart of the Arab world becomes the primary subject of such Iranian feelings. Even though Egypt has an ancient civilization and the bases of the Egyptian state and social system date back to the pre-Islamic era, the fact that Egypt has been the center for intellectual and social developments in the Arab world, and the fact that many trends in the Arab world, from Arab nationalism to Islamism, have first emerged in Egypt, make this country an Arab state in the eyes of the Iranians. The fact that Arab nationalism was born and thrived in Egypt has put this country in the focal point of the conflict between Iranians and Arab nationalists.

The feeling of being victimized, embedded in the Shia religion as the other element of the Iranian state identity, has its own meaning and creates significant emotions among Iranians concerning Egypt. Shia Islam is historically filled with the feelings of victimization and oppression by cruel and unjust rules. This feeling is an integral component of the discourse of independence as the dominant discourse in the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is, to extensive degrees, a result of the experience of Shia as a minority being traumatized by the majority. This perception of being oppressed revitalizes a feeling of pain and sorrow that surrounds Shia historically and transmits interpersonally and intergenerationally through traditional

institutions and customs. The Shia would see in their history a bitter continuation of suppression of the rightful *self* by the unjust rulers and the usurpers. This narration of oppression starts from the incidences of the early days after demise of Prophet Mohammad, passes through the Umayyad Dynasty, Abbasid Dynasty, and local dynasties in Iran, Egypt and other Islamic territories, and ends with the current dire Shia conditions in those Arab states that deny Shias' rights or suppress them.

In the light of this historical experience, the current Shia conditions in Egypt add the emotion of pain to the previously existing pride and resentment born out of Iranian nationalism, which deepens Iran's negative emotional perception of Egypt. Shia religion has been a part of Egypt's history, best known by the Fatimid Caliphate (909-1171). Cairo, the capital of Egypt and Al-Azhar Mosque and University were founded by the Shiites. Despite these historical remarks, the Shia are now a forgotten minority in Egypt (El-Gundy, 2013); harsh policies are adopted against the Shia to the point that they barely have a presence in the society as a social group or even as a minority. Although Egyptian state sees in all minorities a potential source of threat, the negative view towards Shia Muslims is the strongest, to the degree that in certain positions taken by the officials, Shias existence is denied in its totality (Karami, 2015).

The third anecdote that serves as the basis of the formation of the Iranian identity centers on Iran's exposure to foreign invasions throughout history. These exposures have taken different forms from military assaults leading to loss of territory (similar to what Russia did at the beginning of the nineteenth century), political interventions (including Russian and British influence in Iran in the nineteenth and twentieth century and the United States after 1953), economic pressures in form of economic concessions, and what is perceived as a cultural invasion of the West by Iranian conservatives. This anecdote

also carries certain emotions that shape Iranian and Egyptian identity vis-à-vis one another. Since in this narrative, western great powers, particularly the United States and England, constitute the *other* for Iran, the special relations between Egypt and these western countries creates an association between them in Iranian minds so that resentment against the West translates to resentment against Egypt as its ally in the region.

The feeling of being disdained by Britain and then the United States, and therefore a disinclination to engage with them, which is a result of their historical interferences in Iranian affairs and squeezing of concessions (Behravesh, 2012) creates negative stances for Iranians toward Egypt as a close ally of the United States. In fact, the anti-western, anti-imperialist and anti-colonial dimensions of Iran's identity that are born out of resentment against the West have a role to play in shaping Iran's attitude towards Egypt. It should be taken into account that not only has Egypt been inclined to the United States from the 1970s onward, it has also become a state reconciling with the most important ally of the United States in the region, Israel. The special place that Israel occupies in the Egyptian foreign policy in the aftermath of the Camp David Accords, has been rather effective in directing the Iranian–Egyptian perception of one another. Here, the independence-seeking and anti-western identity of Iran, which is closely tied to the emotions of resentment against the West, Israel and their Arab allies in the region, has always kept a tarnished picture of Egypt in Iranian ruling elite's minds as a state dependent on the West and cooperative with Israel. Therefore, what Iran sees as an uneven relationship between Egypt and the United States and conciliation between Egypt and Israel, intensifies the negative Iranian attitude towards Egypt, which was initially created by its Arabism and reinforced by its anti-Shia policies.

Special relations between Egypt and several other Arab states

such as Saudi Arabia and Arab Persian Gulf States who are subject to Iran's negative emotional attachments due to their close partnership with the United States, lead to the intensification of negative feelings about Egypt. Contrary to the Islamic Republic of Iran, whose identity is tied to the resentment against the West, the Arab states in the Persian Gulf, except for Iraq, owe their existence to the British, French and then American policies (Bromley, 2005: 514), and have therefore been dependent on them from the beginning of their formation. This close connection between these Arab countries and the western powers generates fear among them about the Iranian state, which is not only projecting an independent image of itself, but is also revolutionary. This fear explains the persistence of tensions between these countries and Iran. Under such atmosphere, and taking into consideration the close cooperation between Egypt and these Arab states, the tense nature of Iran's relations with the Arab states in the Persian Gulf affects Iran's attitude towards Egypt, and obstructs the way to the resumption of relations.

ii) Egypt, Arab Identity and Iran

As discussed earlier in this paper, the Iranian identity in the course of history is tied to certain emotions concerning Egypt. In the same way, Egyptian identity is tangled with emotions about Iran in the course of its formation. To understand the Egyptian identity, the first step would be to distinguish the Arab identity as the backbone of Egypt's state identity. Since being an Arab is a part of being an Egyptian, making distinctions between Arab and Egyptian identities is not easy. In light of this phenomenon, a connection between Arabism and the two other elements composing the Egyptian identity, that is pre-Islamic Egypt and Egypt as the cradle for Islamist thoughts and tendencies, needs to be established. Even though the Egyptian identity can be theoretically divided into ancient (pharaonic), Islamic and

Arabic, in practice such a distinction is hard to make. In Iran, national and religious components of identity are distinguishable and, in more than one occasion, have been in conflict with each other throughout history. In Egypt, however, the Arabness, being an Egyptian and being a Muslim are not quite distinct. In practice being and Egyptian means being a Muslim Arab.

The distance between ancient and Arabic Egyptian is not much; historical incidences of their conflict are therefore uncommon. The most apparent one is the case under Nasser and Sadat when the two readings of the Egyptian identity collided. While Egypt during Nasser's presidency is more known by Arab nationalism and Egypt is considered as the leader of this Arab nationalism, during Sadat's presidency, the Arabic nationalism was sidelined, giving way for the Egyptian national interests and concerns to come to the fore. After the demise of Sadat, there was a compromise between Arab and Egyptian interests and the state identity was defined accordingly. This has continued to the present day. For Mubarak in particular, the Egyptian state identity was centered on the ideal that Egypt is a leading state in the Arab world; however, this leadership would not come at the expense of national interests, especially when it comes to the issue of resolving the conflict with Israel. As a result, today, Egyptians regard themselves as Arabs who, unlike other Arab states, have a long history of civilization, of which they are very proud.

Similarly, there has been little conflict between nationalism and Islamism in Egypt in the course of the formation of the Egyptian state identity. In fact, from an Arabian perspective, there is little distinction between Islam and Arabness since Islam is born out of an Arabic social and cultural context; they are therefore the two sides of the same coin. For Egyptians, Islam is what was bestowed upon Arabs in a certain historical juncture, entered Egypt in a certain point in history, and is the natural

trend of the development of the Arabic Ummah. Although in Egypt, a distinction can be made between secular pan-Arab tendencies and Islamists like Salafis and the Muslim Brotherhood, this does not mean that the main Islamist currents in Egypt have been in stark contrast to Arabness and have turned it down in its totality. In the final analysis, Islamism in Egypt is a call for a return to the early Islamic age, centered on Hejaz as the heart of the Arab world. In fact, Arab nationalism can be seen as the defining feature and the central element in recognition of the state identity in Egypt.

Similar to Iranian nationalism, Arab nationalism also encountered specific emotions in the process of its formation and its definition of *self* versus *other*. Here, Arab nationalism's stance towards Iran is of significance. Arabism emerged for the first time in the nineteenth century in reaction not to Iran or the West, but as a critical force vis-à-vis the Pan-Turkism in the Ottoman Empire. With the gradual weakening of the Ottoman Empire, especially in the nineteenth century, the bases of the Islamic unity in the empire were weakened and dissatisfactions with Istanbul rose in different parts of the Empire including the Arab territories. In such conditions, under the influence of the European intellectual currents, the Arab Christians who were trying to use Arabic language as a medium for the spread of their religion became the harbingers of Arab nationalism. Arabism took an anti-Turkish stance on the verge of the First World War as a reaction to the Turkification in the Ottoman Empire, which had challenged the cultural status quo. The Turkish subjects of the Empire were heavily influenced by the European nationalists and defined a new identity for themselves not as Muslim members of the Empire, but as Turks at the center with other cultural elements only second to them in the periphery. With the gradual decline of the Ottoman Empire and its dismemberment, Istanbul and the Turkish elites emphasized more firmly on their aspiration to establish a nation-state like

those of Europe. However, this would come at the expense of other nationalities including Arabs. In response to such conditions, anti-Turkish common sentiments among Arabs developed and spread further, resulting in the gradual formation of what is known today as Arabism (Kramer, 1993: 175-178).

As mentioned earlier, while Iranian nationalism started with estrangement from Arabs, Arab nationalism was born out of resentment against Ottomans. This, however, does not mean that the Arab nationalism was devoid of negative emotions against Iran. Anti-Iranian slogans were always a part of Arab nationalists rallying agenda. To satisfy their sense of superiority and their pride of their past, Arab nationalists were referring to the superiority of Arabs to non-Arabs in the history under Arab Caliphates, particularly the Umayyad. In the same way, emphasis on the particularities of the Arabic language, by which Arabs were distinguished from non-Arabs, was another source for pride and glory for Arab nationalists (Suleiman, 2003: 42-66). This demonstrates the way in which such views concerning Iran were used in the procedure of making the Arab identity with the aim of creating internal cohesion for the Arab world; it reveals how the emotion of pride is entrenched in Arab nationalism, which constitutes a base for distancing Arab states from Iran. In Egypt, the Arab nationalism became a powerful social and political discourse from the beginning of the twenty first century although it did not reach a dominant position until the free officers' coup in 1952 and the beginning of Nasser's rule. During this era, the anti-Iranian tendencies could be traced in Arab elite circles. For instance, Ahmed Shawqi, the famous Egyptian poet reflected a feeling of hatred to Iranians in his poems. He was particularly negative about the Iranian Achaemenid Empire and saw in it the reason for the collapse of the ancient Egyptian glory (Khatami et al., 1394 [2015 A.D]: 40).

Arab nationalism as the cornerstone of the Egyptian state identity passed its climax in the 1950s and 1960s. During these two decades and with the rise to power of Nasser, the state identity inclined towards its connection to the other Arab countries from a previous duality of westernization supported by elites dependent on the monarchical system and the Wafd party's independence-seeking ideals. As a result, Egypt introduced itself as the leader of the Arab world. At this time, Iranian-Egyptian political encounters took the form of Arab nationalists' confrontation with Iran. One clear example of Egypt's anti-Iranian measures during this time was coining the term Arab Gulf for the Persian Gulf, first used after Nasser came to power in Egypt (Zraiack, 2016). Although Arab nationalism lost its momentum as the sole reference for the state identity after Nasser, Sadat's 'first Egypt' approach would not mean that the identity of the Egyptian state would drive it to reconcile with Iran. In contrary, the priority given to the Egyptian interests led Sadat to work with the West and Israel and this further entrenched Egypt's stance against Iran, which was not only Shia but also anti-West and anti-Israel after the Islamic revolution in 1979. There was increasing expectations that after the Iranian revolution, Iran's religiosity would create enthusiasm in Iran to engage with the Arab and Muslim Egypt. However, the realities did not live up to the expectations: nationalism was weakened in the Iranian state identity and replaced by Shi'ism and anti-westernism, which pushed the country even further away from Egypt as an ally of the United States and a state reconciling with Israel. From that time onwards, the feelings of sympathy for the Palestinians and the resentment against the West and Israel overshadowed the Iranian outlook of Egypt. This continued throughout Sadat and Mubarak's presidencies, and even the short-lived rise of the Islamists under Morsi's administration could not bring a major change to that.

The developments in Egypt after the January 2011 revolution

502

were not a turn in the state identity from a national-Arab to a national-Islamic one as was assumed at the beginning of the Muslim Brotherhood's rise to power. In the post-Mubarak era, the nationalists, with their populism and inclination to militarism once again gained relevance (Dunne, 2015: 5) and played part in directing the revolution's path into a military coup and transition of power to Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. The developments in Egypt after 2011, the collapse of regimes and the establishment of new ones demonstrated that Egyptians do not welcome an Iranian discourse. As pointed out by Monier (2014: 421), while Iran was after an Islamic awakening and Turkey endeavored for democratic transition in the Arab world, the uprisings in the Arab countries [here Egypt] took their own path away from the Iranian or Turkish models. This demonstrates that the Arab world [Egypt in our case] pursues its own discursive model that is different from the non-Arab countries of the region.

Conclusion

The lack of political relations between Iran and Egypt for a long period of time has weakened considerations related to national security and interests in Iranian and Egyptian views of each other. In the absence of political, and as a result economic, trade, and cultural relations between the two countries, Iran and Egypt live as strangers to each other and do not feel under any obligation set by security or economic necessities to resume relations. When material calculations do not push the two countries to rebuild their relations, identity-related considerations play a part in determining the outcome of occasional initiatives to re-establish relations. The Iranian and Egyptian identities are shaped in response to historical encounters between Iranians and Arabs on the one hand, and Iran and Egypt's individual experiences and interactions with the western powers on the other hand, with all such encounters creating certain emotions for the two countries. These emotional

predispositions affect the way in which both sides perceive each other and their policies. Iranian nationalism as the first element of the Iranian state identity carries a feeling of being unjustly treated by the Arab nationalists who degraded Iranian position in the Islamic civilization by reducing it into a mere Arab – Islamic one in which non-Arabs had only marginal contributions. Egypt as the heart of the Arab world and the cradle for Arab nationalism becomes the direct subject of such Iranian feelings. At the same time, the religious component of the Iranian identity carries a collective pain that Shia Muslims have tolerated in the hands of certain Arab rulers. This common pain translates itself into empathy to the Shia living in contemporary times under unfavorable conditions in Arab countries including Egypt. This empathy is provocative for the Egyptian state, which is opposed to Shia identification in its territory. In addition, the resentment against the western countries, particularly England and the United States, embedded in the Iranian identity, puts the Iranian emotionally constructed identity more in contradiction with Egypt as a state allied with the United States and conciliatory towards Israel.

On the part of Egypt, the Arab identity is known by defamiliarization from Iranians. The zenith of Arab nationalism's confrontation with Iran was during Nasser's rule, manifested rather strongly in coining the term 'Arab Gulf' for the Persian Gulf. Despite the fact that the otherization of Iran in the formal Egyptian discourse was weakened under Sadat, reconciliation between Egypt and Israel on the one hand, and its establishment of close relations with the United States on the other hand made for the waning of the Arabism's estrangement of Iran and hindered the path to a new positive emotional mutual understanding between the two countries. Form this time until the end of the Mubarak era, the emotions-based mutual understanding of the two countries became heavily influenced by Iran's resentment against the West and Egypt as its close ally

504

in the region. Even, ascendance of the Islamists to power in the aftermath of the January 2011 revolution in Egypt could not transform the Egyptian identity and henceforth its emotional perception of Iran, particularly after the Arab and Egyptian nationalist forces overthrew Muslim Brotherhood and returned the control of the state to the military establishment.

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