

**University of Bucharest
Center for Arab Studies**

مركز
المطراسات
العربية

**ROMANO-ARABICA
VIII-XI
2008-2011**

Islamic Space: Linguistic and Cultural Diversity

UNIVERSITY OF BUCHAREST
CENTER FOR ARAB STUDIES

ROMANO-ARABICA

New Series
N° 8-11

Islamic Space: Linguistic and Cultural Diversity



editura universității din bucurești®

2011

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Published by:

© **Center for Arab Studies**

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E-mail: editura@unibuc.ro

Internet: www.editura.unibuc.ro

ISSN 1582-6953

FOREWORD

This issue of *Romano-Arabica* contains the proceedings of the International Colloquium *Islamic Space: Linguistic and Cultural Diversity*, organized by the *Center for Arab Studies* of the University of Bucharest, which was held in Bucharest, on May 21th, 2011.

Finally, we, as organisers, would like to thank each and every participant for making the International Colloquium *Islamic Space: Linguistic and Cultural Diversity* an extremely enjoyable and worthwhile event.

The Colloquium Organisers

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SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON THE CONCEPT OF *MUWĀṬĀNA*

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University of Bucharest

*Citizenship is a necessary fiction with variable content*¹.

Abstract

Discussions about the concept of *muwāṭana*, which concerns to a significant extent political thought in the Arab World, place themselves in a common paradigm, if we take into consideration the evolvement of similar concepts, borrowed or translated from Western culture. Thus, there are two main paradigms of interpretation and reporting to the new cultural acquisitions: on the one hand, the attempt to demonstrate that, although under a different semantic wrapper, the previously mentioned reality is present in the Arab-Islamic culture; on the other hand, the term's absolute novelty in lexical, historical and semantic terms for the culture of this area. However, we can easily recognize the two paradigms of interpretation, the universalistic one, with supporters in Arabic expression world, along with the one of cultural specificity, which has found an important representative in Bernard Lewis and others Western intellectuals.

Key words: *citizenship, al-muwatana, Muslim identity*

I. Introduction

For this analysis, I worked on set texts which reflect both positions, and this is the point where I would like to mention texts of Muhammad Arkūn, *Al-Fikru al-Islāmiyyu: qirā'at^{um} 'ilmiyyat^{um}* (Islamic thinking: a secular reading), but also on other comments the Algerian author has had on several occasions in relation to this subject; we also relied on texts of Moroccan author Muhammad 'Ābid al-Ġābirī with *Al-'Aqlu s-siyāsiyu l-'arabiyyu* (Arab political thought) and a series of articles on the same topic, published in the Arab press of opinion. In addition, several other authors considered minor when compared to the two above-mentioned names, but whose views on the subject we consider at least as interesting, and who will be mentioned along the way.

I would like to start with a question which triggered the present analysis. What does the *muwāṭana* term bring new, in other words, why is it necessary in semantic terms and its equivalence in political practice in Arab-Islamic World, as long as it already exists the more functional term *ḡinsiyyia*, translated by the most important dictionaries as “nationality”. At terminological level another questions

¹ Abdelkader Belbahri. 2008. *Les enjeux de la reconnaissance des minorités. Les figures du respect*. Paris: L'Harmattan, p. 19

arises: what is the name of the bearer of *ġinsiyyia*? *al-muwātin*? Dictionaries² establish as equivalents *al-muwātin* and ‘citizen’ (Wehr), ‘citoyen’ or ‘compatriote’ (Larousse) while *al-muwātinūna* are those who share a common *ġinsiyya*. The novelty of the term *muwātana* is also proven by its absence from a series of bilingual dictionaries: Hans Wehr does not even note the third form of the verb *waṭana*, *yaṭinu* (to sit, to live a place), whereas the active participle *muwātin* is mentioned. *Al-Manhal* (French-Arabic dictionary) under ‘citoyenneté’ marks the equivalent *muwātinīyya* explained as *ṣifatu l-muwāṭini* (characteristic of being a citizen). Larousse (1999 edition) records the third form of the root of the verb *wāṭana*, *yuwāṭinu* with the meaning ‘partager la même patrie’, ‘être concitoyen de’, whereas for ‘citoyenneté’ uses the same vocable *muwātinīyya*. Unlike earlier dictionaries, Larousse also records the form *muwātana* not as isolated but as part of the expression *ḥaqqu l-muwāṭanati*, equated with ‘droit de cité’.

Starting from this linguistic reality, rather characterized by terminological confusion³, I have tried to determine by directly observing in texts of Arab authors the meaning which is commonly assigned to vocable *muwātana*, given its today frequent use (on one of the most accessed search engines *muwātana* has more than four and a half million entries).

II. *Muwātana* have no connection with *waṭan*

In most texts, authors feel the need to explain the history of this term, or, more exactly, its Western history, most of them failing to find an equivalent in the history of Arab political thought, but presenting it as a goal for each and every society which envisages itself governed by democracy. One of the most vehement explanations, based on denying any possible Arab or Islamic paternity of *muwātana* belongs to Muhammad ‘Ābid al-Ġābirī: ‘it won’t be easy at all to convince the Arabs that *muwātin* and *muwātana* have no connection with *waṭan* and that they are nothing but lexical inventions meant to equate and explain the terms ‘citoyen’ and ‘citoyenneté’ or *citizen* and *citizenship* in Western culture’, says Moroccan professor and philosopher⁴. Those who link the concept of

² *Al-Manhal* (Dictionnaire français - arabe), 2000, Dār al-Adāb, Beyrouth ; *As-sabīl al-wasīl*, 1999, *Dictionnaire arabe-français* (rédaction Daniel Reig), Paris : Larousse ; Abdelnour, Jabbour, 1995, *Dictionnaire détaillé français – arabe*, Dar El- Ilm Lilmalayin, Beyrouth ; Wehr, Hans, 1980, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, London : MacDonald & Evans LTD

³ Azzedine Allam characterize *muwātana* as “vague, ambiguous and plurisemantic word, still badly understood in by the Arabs ” (Allam, 2005, p. 93)

⁴ In the article *Al-Muwāṭīnu wa-l muwāṭanatu...’amsi wa-l yawma*, published on 4th March 2008 in www.liberaldemocraticpartyofiraq.com, and consulted on 15th May 2011.

muwātana with the vocable *wātan* are definitely entitled to do that in linguistic terms, considers al-Ġābirī, but they commit a serious cultural and political inaccuracy. It is possible to identify what al- Ġābirī calls a mistake by closely observing the meaning that *citizenship* has in Western political culture.

Therefore, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy⁵ explains the concept of citizenship by relating it to the democratic type of government, in which citizens actively participate in city life, have rights and responsibilities, their relation with the state is a direct one and held at individual level. In the West, the concern for the concept of citizenship has significantly increased, in the nineties, in the sense of its necessary reformulation, considering the increasing internal diversity of Western liberal democracies but also, given the pressure the globalization process began to put on classic territorial state.⁶

Thus, the concept of *citizenship* had to adjust itself to the relation between citizenship and nationality in terms of pluralism manifested on multiple plans. Beyond theoretical trends, that customize the discussion about *citizenship* in Western cultural and political space and that are not covered by the present study, we should mention two features of the concept. I believe these features, although coming from different ideological directions, complement each other in the attempt to define the concept in question. The concept of citizenship encompasses the civil rights that a citizen has within a sovereign state, territorially defined, but, at the same time, the concept has also a psychological dimension, as it provides the citizen with a certain type of identity.⁷

These two elements have particularly drawn our attention, given the multiple definitions they assign to *citizenship*, as we also discover them in the attempts of Arab authors to historically motivate the existence of this concept in the Islamic political thought. On the other hand, there is an increasing appetite in the West for discussing *the postnational citizenship*, concept whose definition renounces the specific values of a nation, in its classical sense, while the citizen-individual has to refer to the universal principles that transcend cultural differences and find other common denominators of identity. For the European Union, beside the national citizenships of the EU members, the European citizenship became lately an issue impossible to avoid. In this context, there are voices claiming that European citizenship “cannot be a simple extension of national citizenship, but it should reaffirms the values and norms of civic

⁵ At section ‘Citizenship’ published on 13th October 2006 and accessed on 10th May, electronic address: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/citizenship>.

⁶ Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, p.1

⁷ Idem, p. 2.

republicanism” (Skrobacki, 2007: 227-246). We have to take in consideration these attempts in discussing where Western Muslims place themselves inside the Western societies.

Moreover, multicultural citizenship represent a very recurrent idea in the Western debates about the future of this concept. Kymlicka⁸, for instance, believes that multicultural citizenship will be more appropriate for a several Western countries whose deepest challenge to their social cohesion comes from their historic national minorities, not their immigrants⁹. Definitely, the concept of citizenship and its meanings in the Western countries¹⁰ face a continuous moving and reformulating content. From now on, reformulations on the concept of citizenship have to take in consideration the reality of immigrants’ presence, especially that they seem *have no desire to be dragged into these old battles. Many of them left countries with destabilizing ethnic/sectarian conflicts, and they did not come to Britain to become foot soldiers in someone else’s identity conflicts* (Kymlicka, 2011, p.291).

Returning to the Arab authors, who fail to find in Arab-Islamic thought any relevant argument on whose basis Arab society might have developed independently of foreign influences, an equivalent concept for citizenship, we bring into discussion the pair of terms *al-muwāṭana* versus *al-’abawiyya*. In the reading of two of the leading theoreticians of the concept *al-muwāṭana*¹¹ and the transferring of this concept in Islamic cultural area, the term is defined by a series of conceptual oppositions, meant to clarify its meaning. Therefore, the first opposite relation establishes in relation to *al-’abawiyya*. The existing link between *rabbu l-usrati*, embodying the dominant authority in the family and *at-tiflu l-mahmiyyu* as protected entity, has exceeded the small family frame and has

⁸ Kymlicka, Will. 2011. *Multicultural citizenship within multination states*. In “Ethnicities”, 11(3) 281–302, sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav, etn.sagepub.com

⁹ For example, when the 2003 UK Home Office Citizenship Survey asked ‘how strongly you belong to Britain’, 85.95 per cent of Indians, 86.38 per cent of Pakistanis, and 86.85 per cent of Bangladeshis said that they belong either ‘fairly’ or ‘very’ strongly to Britain – numbers that are essentially identical to the 86.7 per cent of whites who said they either fairly or very strongly belong. By contrast, only 8.5 per cent of Catholics in Northern Ireland identify as British (Coakley, 2007). That may be an exceptional case, but Scots too are less likely than immigrants to identify as British – a seemingly stable 33 per cent of Scots reject even a partial British identity (Kymlicka, 2011, p. 283).

¹⁰ In fact, Romania and other Eastern countries have a very long experience in restructuring the meanings of “citizenship”.

¹¹ Muhammad Arkūn and Muhammad ‘Ābid al-Ġābirī

multiplied itself across the whole social structure, providing society with a strong and defining patriarchal character¹².

The patriarchal type of organization is characteristic for the pre-capitalist nature of social relations, representing an organization form historically certified in a particular phase of development of Europe. However, it continues to exist and to regulate social relations in certain cultural areas, starting with the Arab area to the Indian and East-Asian one, with differences from one cultural world to another (Sharabi, 1988, p. 15 -17). A conceptual series, established by reference to modernity, identifies the main categories that form *al-abawiyya*: myth, religion, political organization on vertical direction, the importance of attachment to family and clan, the primacy of rhetoric to the detriment of rational analysis (Sharabi, 1988, p. 18).

On the other hand, Muhammad Arkūn argues that in the Western concept of citizenship, *muwāṭana* constitutes itself around the notion *al-fard*, insisting on the role of the individual in his relationship with the state. In Arab-Islamic society, the concept around which social relations are conceived is *al-ḡamā'a*, the group outside which the individual is annihilated. Muhammad Arkūn¹³ believes that the idea of *ḡamā'a* around which the social political organization of the Islamic traditional state is formulated, represents the main obstacle in trying to adopt and, especially understand the concept of *muwāṭana*.

In the texts I have analyzed, *muwāṭana* is most frequently defined through what it does not represent, as it follows: *muwāṭana* is not a simple affiliation to a geographical area, or just a citizenship and a passport; it encompasses a set of values, such as individual freedom, solidarity and civil responsibility. In a paper devoted to this subject, Adnān as-Sayyid Husayn¹⁴ opposes *muwāṭana* to the idea of *fitna tā'ifiyya* (sectarian division), asserting that *muwāṭana* is inconsistent with the state of *iḥtilāl* (occupation), which can be achieved in conditions of *siyāda waṭaniyya* (national sovereignty). The conceptual opposition prologues itself to the point of emphasizing the incompatibility between the notions of *muwāṭin* and *muslim*. Thus, 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Afindī names one of his papers concerned with this matter *I'ādatu n-naẓari fī l-mafhūmi t-taqlīdī li-l ḡamā'ati fī-l 'islāmi: muslim^{un} am muwāṭin^{un}?* (*Reassessment of the traditional concept of group in Islam: Muslim or Citizen?*)

¹² According to Abd al-Ghānī al-Azharī in the article *The issue of the concept of muwāṭana in Arab political thought*, published on <http://docteurabdelghanielazhari.maktoobblog.com>, accessed on 14th May 2011.

¹³ According to Muhammad Arkūn, 1992, *Al-Fikru al-Islāmiyyu: qirā'at^{un} 'ilmiyyat^{un}* · (*Arab thinking: a secular reading*) Bayrūt: Markaz dirāsāt al-wahda al-'arabiyya

¹⁴ in the paper *Al-Muwāṭanatu fī-l waṭani-l-'arabī* (*Citizenship in Arab world*), 2008, Rabat

In close connection to the above opposition, another combination of terms is brought into discussion, in position to explain why, at least for the moment, *muwāṭana* cannot be absorbed and assimilated by the Arab-Islamic political thought. It is the case of the opposition *muwāṭana* versus *‘ubūdiyya*, both concepts involving a vertical relation of the individual, in the first case with the state, in terms of rights and responsibilities, with the divine, in the second case, with many more obligations and responsibilities and no rights. *Muwāṭana* is also explained as the opposite of the classical concept of *ra‘īyya* who is still the main political perspective on the political participation of the people in the Islamic thought (at least that is what it used to be before the so-called Arab Spring). According to the classical Islamic political view, the *ra‘īyya* has one very important duty: not to develop any political or public activity (Allam, 2005, p. 94) and to represent the fundamentals the power is built on. However, the negative perspective on the ordinary people (which is also observable in the terminology used in their denomination) was a common reference for the Western civilization until Modern Revolutions. As we know, the Arab vocabulary, in the context of modern political acquisitions, assimilated new concepts and produced new ones. Thus, during this complex process, Western semantic realities were assimilated by Arabic language and created new born social and political situations. Items as “fard” (individual), “nāḥib” (elector), “ša‘b” (people), *sukkān* (inhabitants) introduced other perspectives on the political participation of the ordinary people¹⁵.

III. *Muwāṭana* explained as part of Islamic political thought

National social imaginary, generator of political discourse, brings together ideas, perceptions, interpretations of reality that together form the unity of a national group. Belonging to such a group is a type of *muwāṭana* the most common in the current understanding of the term in Arab World. We observe the contamination with classic definitions of the idea of nation and loyalty to it, such as that of Al-Fārābī, according to whom: ‘nation is a group of individuals united by a number of factors, including common language (Zurayq, 1997, p. 54). This way, a semantic overlap takes place, *muwāṭana* being understood as a type of belonging to a previously existing and historically identifiable unity, whether it refers to *waṭan* or *umma* or *ḡamā‘a*, so that in Arab world we have *waṭaniyyūna* and *qawmiyyūna* but we cannot have *muwāṭimūna*.¹⁶

¹⁵ Cf. Allam, 2005. P. 98. See also Sitaru, Laura. 2009. *Arab Political Thought. Key concepts between tradition and innovation*. Iassy: Polirom

¹⁶ According to Muhammad ‘Ābid al-Ġābirī, work cited.

As with other new borrowed concepts, which I discussed in a previous paper, it is observable for the term *muwāṭana* also the attempt to identify equivalents, both lexical and especially semantic ones in the history of political experiences in Islamic area. Therefore, according to the parameters required by the Western defining of the concept *al-muwāṭana* is explained by using two essential concepts for Islamic governance (defined this way by classic authors, from Al-Māwardī to Al-Fārābī), *al-‘adl* ṣi *al-musāwāt*. Beyond discussing the research method used for attempting to define the modern concept by relating it to historical realities of a different nature, the recurrent question in studies about *muwāṭana* comes down to discussing the content of the relation between *al-ḥākim* and *al-maḥkūm* or *ar-rā‘ī* and *ar-ra‘īyya* of Islam’s classical political theories and the semantic parameters of the modern concept of *muwāṭana*, product of Western modern culture.

Most often explained by the term *al-musāwāt* (equality) the concept of *muwāṭana* draws its ideological essence from the Quranic text, such as convincingly explains Abd al-Ghānī al-Azhari¹⁷ in the first verse of Sura *Women*: ‘You, people, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul, of which He also created the pair... (Quran, 4:1). On the other hand, the distantiation from the initial Quranic recommendations during the Omayyad and Abbasid dynasties would have undermined the principle of equality which the early age Islam was built on and it brought to the surface the tribal clashes for supremacy and power. In this way, the relapse in the spirit *ḡāhiliyya*, dominated by *‘aṣā’ir* ṣi *qabā’il* gradually excluded the founding concepts *‘adl* and *musāwāt* from the political organization of the Islamic state, rendering therefore the ownership and integration of the modern concept of *muwāṭana* particularly difficult.

It seems thus that *muwāṭana*, undoubtedly another type of identity reporting, superior or not to historical ones, but more flexible and sometimes, more comprehensive in the universal validity of the values it promotes, in the world of Arab-Islamic culture has to take the path from different forms of *ḡamā‘a* (ethnic, religious) to the notion of *muwāṭin*, translated as *citizen*, (in respect to compliance to a common set of values) and not as *compatriot* (individual sharing a territory with others like him).

In the process of shaping a customized semantic sphere *muwāṭana* results from the analyzed texts as a multiple-semantic concept, built on different moving layers of significance. It was, thus possible to encounter adjacent attributes for the term *muwāṭana*, such as *‘arabiyya* or *ḡalīḡiyya* or *‘irāqiyya* or even *muwāṭana muqāwima li-l ‘iḡtilāl*, in the particular case of applying the concept to

¹⁷ In the article *The issue of the concept of muwāṭana in Arab political thought*, published on <http://docteurabdelghanielazhari.maktoobblog.com>, accessed on 14th May 2011.

Palestinian Territories. Even if remaining in the sphere of classical identity loyalties, for some of these contextualization of the concept *muwāṭana*, it is still possible to observe a diversification of sources providing identifying criteria, such as the belonging to a privileged economic area *muwāṭana ḥaliḡiyya*.

IV. Some final remarks

I believe the difficulty of assimilating the concept of citizenship (*muwāṭana*?) by Arab-Islamic society is also enhanced (but not entirely) by the fact that, in the West, the notion itself undergoes a process of reevaluation and redefinition. Notions as *European citizenship* or *global citizenship*, both concepts undo the classic contact of the citizen with a certain territory, generally, national one, generates a state of uncertainty including the Western world.

Discussions on *European citizenship* triggered endless debates about the content of idea of European citizen, and especially, about to what extent the Muslims living in Europe can internalize this reality.

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