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National Security Spoils Pro-Government Nationalism: Changing Discourses and Representations of the *Mawlid* Bride Doll in Post-Revolutionary Egypt

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Abstract

Nationalism has continued to influence Egyptian lives to the present day. On the other hand, current Egyptian nationalism has a significant disconnect with the nationalism of the past in that the state relies heavily on attempts to unify the nation through national security. In order to understand current Egyptian nationalism, this paper analyzes the citizens' nationalism in discourses and representations of the *mawlid* bride dolls (*'arūsa al-mawlid*) in terms of "the less elaborated narrative." This way of narrating, essential to both state and *'arūsa* discourses and expressions, mainly comprises ambiguous and positive meanings that avoid political conflict and argument among people. Since the late 2010s, the reinforcement of security has promoted this narrative throughout society and led citizens to increase the use of *'arūsa* as a representative of this narrative. As a result, the spread of *'arūsa* continues. This phenomenon can be interpreted as citizens' attempt to avoid state interventions by creating "pro-governmental" practices based on "the less elaborated narrative." However, this spread not only led to criticism by "Salafis" and "extremists" of *'arūsa* but also to a "Salafi" vs. state debate on the distinct and political form. Although "the less elaborated narrative" was the foundation of the spread of *'arūsa* as a "pro-government" movement, the "Salafi" vs. state debate might spoil this foundation.

1. Introduction

In modern Egyptian history, nationalism (this article defines it as "the various movements that seek to determine the nation-state and how the people living there should be) has always been an important concern of the state and its people. In present-day Egypt, the attachment to nationhood and nationalism has broadly influenced the lives of citizens and how the state governs them. Many studies indicate directly [e.g., Aboelezz 2017b: 144] or indirectly that nationalism in Egypt is currently rising unprecedently.[1] On the one hand, the state promotes Egyptian "heritage" and "authenticity"; on the other hand, citizens have an increasing interest

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in ancient Egyptian sites, museums, and Islamic architecture. Citizenship and Islam are juxtaposed in national school textbooks to foster patriotism [Sobhy 2023: 149–150], and some citizens consider themselves as descendants of the ancient Egyptians [Ibraheem 2023]. While still important, Islam is not as manifest as it once was due to disillusionment with the previous Muslim Brotherhood's regime and the government's thorough suppression of Islamic organizations.

In order to more accurately understand the aspects of current Egyptian nationalism, it is advisable to organize the descriptions of previous studies in terms of continuity and disconnection with past nationalisms, focusing on the forms that state and civil nationalisms took, respectively. They suggest that the content of nationalism since the late 19th century and of nationalism today, both in state and citizen, is more continuous than disconnected.

The first continuity is territorial nationalism, which flourished during the decolonial period of the late 19th century and the Nasser period [e.g., Gershoni and Jankowski 1995]. Jannis Grimm notes that sovereignty over the Red Sea islands of Tiran and Sanafir was transferred in 2017 from Egypt to Saudi Arabia. In this case, he discusses how territorial nationalism among citizens was elevated and developed into a protest against the current regime, which should have promoted the same kind of nationalism [Grimm 2019]. This case indicates that territorial nationalism still exists in the state and its citizens. In addition, supra-Egyptian nationalism, which regarded Egypt as occupying a leading position among Arab states, became widespread in the 1930s. Some theorists who place *'āmmīya* (Egyptian Arabic dialect) above modern standard Arabic remind us that this idea also exists today [Aboelezz 2017a].[2] Pharaonic nationalism, which seeks to arouse patriotism by using ancient Egyptian legends, artifacts, and monuments, has also grown significantly in recent years, both on the part of the state and its citizens, and there are concerns that it is fostering discrimination [Wood 1998; Ibraheem 2023]. Some researchers have pointed out that both the Mursi and al-Sisi regimes, which pursued seemingly very different policies, ultimately sought to unify the nation based on patriarchal consciousness [Shahin and El-Ghazaly 2017], while others see continuity between past and present nationalism in the descriptions in textbooks [Sobhy 2015; 2023]. Lila Abu-Lughod suggests that the Egyptian cultural industry is engaged in creating national pedagogy as well as art and entertainment [Abu-Lughod 2005: 159]. In the same way, the present film industry, which tends to feature "Islamists" as antagonists, engages the national pedagogy of a regime enhancing security [Katsuhata 2020]. Moreover, as discussed in more detail later, the development of arts and crafts in modern and contemporary Egypt has always been closely associated with nationalism in both state and citizen [Winegar 2006; 2014; Kane

2 Egyptian nationalism has been well studied through how intellectuals perceive the Arabic language (Modern Standard Arabic and *'āmmīya*/Arabic Egyptian dialect), which suggests that language nationalism is still important today [Bassiouney 2014; Aboelezz 2017a; 2017b].

2013; Ramadan 2013; Seggerman 2019].

A further continuity is that the majority of citizens who are not intellectuals also actively construct national identities independently of the state; Ziad Fahmy notes that citizens played a central role in shaping "the people" in the first half of the 20th century [Fahmy 2011], and Abu-Lughod also shows the construction of national identity by citizens through TV dramas during the Mubarak regime [Abu-Lughod 2005]. In addition, Grimm suggests that even today, citizens can construct their own nationalism in conflict with the state, even if they espouse the same territorial nationalism.

The disconnect of nationalism between the past and present is found mainly on the side of the nationalism of the state: the current state's attempt to integrate its citizens through the selective construction of security threats ("terrorists," "foreign interference," and "COVID-19" as "others") and the propagation of their negative impact on the "(authentic) Egyptian people." I would name it "security nationalism."

In this article, this conceptualization aims to disseminate the idea of security nationalism rather than define it as a concrete term. Although nationalism studies have a long and deep history,[3] and subsuming citizens into the nation by national security is widely found in various countries, it has yet to be conceptualized in nationalism-related research. In the wake of this fact, this article introduces security nationalism and will discuss its characteristics in Egypt, focusing on its contribution to Egyptian area studies and anthropology of Egypt. In other words, the paper's contribution is to show the fact that the current Egyptian government places security nationalism at the top of its agenda and uses it without excluding many other existing nationalisms (as long as they do not violate the principle of security) and its impact on civil life. On the other hand, the contribution of this paper to overall nationalism studies is to promote the introduction of the concept of security nationalism in other areas and the theoretical elaboration of the concept. In particular, in political science and nationalism studies, its commonalities and peculiarities should be considered in future research.

In present Egypt, stronger security nationalism is a significant disconnect from the past. Of course, such an attempt itself, like the other nationalisms mentioned above, were always considered important by both states and citizens. Abdelrahman [2007], for example, illustrates this fact by analyzing how the state has treated the concept of human rights since the Nasser period. According to her, human rights were initially dismissed as a conspiracy of Western human rights organizations, that is, as a security threat that would cause domestic conflict, but since the mid-1980s, they have gradually been incorporated into the nation. The state finally has come to identify itself as the defender of human rights. As Abdelrahman suggests, the current administration and previous administrations before Mubarak emphasize the attempt to achieve national unity through security. Citizens are also concerned with security. For instance,

3 Recent nationalism studies focus on "national indifference" [e.g., van Ginderachter and Fox 2019].

I have observed a discourse justifying the government's ban on rituals due to the "negative impact of the Muslim Brotherhood."[4]

However, it was in the late 2010s that the state placed greater emphasis on security than before, in that the government had a severe attitude towards its perceived threat or "enemy," and from this point of view, one can differentiate nationalism in Egypt today from that of the past. In particular, from 2013, when al-Sisi (ʻAbd al-Fattāḥ al-Sīsī) seized power, government control and repression have been exercised over a broader range of civil life, regardless of religion or ideology. Not only have Islamic extremists and the Muslim Brotherhood been linked and thoroughly eliminated as threats, but Islamism in general, whether moderate or radical, and all actors critical of the regime have become targets of intervention, arrests, and violent repression [e.g., Grimm 2019: 451; Moussa and Yokota 2023: Ardovini and Mabon 2020; Russell 2023]. Security nationalism has gained a significant presence in Egypt today.

As described above, in Egypt, there is a continuity of nationalism, such as territorial nationalism, pharaonic nationalism, linguistic nationalism, and security nationalism. They have been continuously embodied in the discourse and practices of both the state and the people from the past to the present. In this continuity, the state tries to impose its nationalism on citizens unilaterally. Citizens, at the same time, also construct their nationalism independently, which sometimes cooperates with the state and sometimes conflicts with it. On the other hand, there is a disconnect in that the state is strengthening security nationalism to the extent of "zero tolerance," leading to a severe impact on the citizens' lives today. In summary, the combination of many continuities with the nationalism of the past and a few but significant ruptures is the overall situation of nationalism in Egypt today.

However, studies of current nationalism tend to focus too much on the rupture with the past, focusing on the reinforcement of security, and they usually offer a top-down description where citizens only resist state nationalism, assuming that the state is the only source of nationalism. Except for studies by Grimm and Maria Aboelezz, nationalism constructed and maintained by citizens is faintly suggested and rarely explicitly discussed.[5] Furthermore, the current relationship between the state's nationalism and the citizens' nationalism is seldom discussed. Therefore, it is necessary to deal with specific aspects of nationalism among Egyptian citizens and accumulate related case studies to understand nationalism in Egypt from the late 2010s. In particular, it is crucial to indicate that citizens not only resist the state but also try to cooperate with it. Describing such complex relationships between the state and citizens will contribute not only to the study of nationalism but also complement the research

4 Specifically, some citizens have expressed the view that the banning of the *mawlid* in Tanta in 2022 was because "the [Muslim] Brotherhood makes bad things [in English]," not because the local government is trying to prevent the spread of COVID-19 [October 5, 2022, in Tanta].

5 However, Aboelezz's study of civil national identity is still insufficient to examine civic nationalism entirely because it only presents the claims of a small minority of intellectuals and activists.

trends that focus on resistance and protests.

In this paper, therefore, I examine aspects of nationalism and its relationship between the state's nationalism and the citizens' nationalism in the contemporary period, drawing on the discourses and expressions of *'arūsa al-mawlid* based on my fieldwork and collected local Arabic sources.[6] The various types of nationalism in Egypt today, whether promoted by the state or citizens, can be observed in various aspects of society, including daily life, festivals, and the political sphere. In this regard, *'arūsa al-mawlid* is a valuable subject for the discussion of this paper.

First, let me briefly introduce *'arūsa al-mawlid*. During *mawlid* (the festivals of the birth of prophets and saints), especially during the *mawlid* of the Prophet Muhammad, many Egyptians buy and consume sweets manufactured and sold during that period. Next to the sweets in temporary stalls and booths, dolls in the shape of knights, ships, and saints' mausoleums are often seen. Among these, the *'arūsa al-mawlid* has a distinctive presence. The Arabic word *'arūsa* means "bride" in the first sense and "doll" in the second sense. *'Arūsa al-mawlid* thus means "*Mawlid* bride doll." The typical form of *'arūsa* is a woman in a dress with a fan or circular ornament on her back and her hands on her hips. At present, there are two types of *'arūsa al-mawlid*: the sugar *'arūsa* (*'arūsa al-sukkar*) and the plastic *'arūsa* (*'arūsa al-blāstīk*) (see Photo 1 and 2).

Photos 1 (left) and 2 (right). Plastic *'arūsa* (left: photo by the author in Tanta, October 14, 2018; sugar *'arūsa* (right: photo by the author in Cairo, November 7, 2019).

As I indicate below, *'arūsa al-mawlid* allows us to consider the current relationship between the state and citizens on nationalism. In the following sections, I will discuss the

6 Fieldwork was conducted intermittently from 2014 to 2022, and Arabic materials were collected during that period.

discourses and expressions of citizens about *'arūsa* and their changes since the late 2010s. The second section will identify the similarities between the national discourse of Egyptianness and discourses and expressions of *'arūsa*. I define this characteristic of avoiding difference and negative meaning as "the less elaborated narrative" and show that the similarity continues from the late 20th century to the present.

Section 3 describes the spread of *'arūsa* among citizens since the late 2010s. It will show that this spread is a phenomenon that stems from the strengthening of security nationalism by the state during the same period and that it is the product of "pro-governmental" activities on the part of citizens who have tried to adapt to the state's strengthened security. Based on the situation described in Section 3, Section 4 will present examples of how the spread of *'arūsa* has led to a wider recognition of *'arūsa* among the public, which in turn has led to criticism of *'arūsa* by "Salafis" and "radicals." This criticism by such actors was perceived as a serious threat to national security and provoked a specific and strong rebuttal due to the state's zero-tolerance security policy. However, this objection and sharp conflict between "Salafis" and the State simultaneously might spoil "the less elaborated narrative" essential to the spread of *'arūsa* as the "pro-government movement" of citizens.

This paper concludes that although the state's strengthened security in the late 2010s promoted the spread of *'arūsa* as a citizens' "pro-government" practice, it eventually might spoil the basis of this spread, "the less elaborated narrative."

2. Affinities between National Discourse and Citizens' Discourse of *'Arūsa al-Mawlid*: In Terms of "the Less Elaborated Narrative"

In this section, after looking at the characteristics of the narrative style of the national discourse on Egyptianness, we will show that it is very similar to that of *'arūsa*'s discourses (using concepts of *sha'bī*, *turāth*, and *aṣāla*, and regarding Egyptian history as continuity between the ancient, Christian, and Islamic eras).[7] To reveal the similarities, I refer to Hania Sobhy's [2023] description of Islam in secondary school textbooks. When Sobhy analyzes the discourse that civil rights and justice are derived from Islam, she indicates that "even when Islam is associated with justice, there is no elaboration of concrete legal, political, economic or social rights that could be inspired by or derived from Islamic texts" [Sobhy 2023: 150]. Also, regarding Islamic history, she analyses that "students are left with an idealized picture of Muslim history and know little about the violence and injustice that plagued different Muslim caliphates" [Sobhy 2023: 137]. What Sobhy suggests is a state ahistorical narrative trying to subsume Muslim students to the nation under ambiguous and positive ties. These narratives avoid explicit beliefs and convictions that lead to conflict and argument among Muslims as much as possible and do not derive from specific and distinct sources, such as Islamic texts.

7 This section is based on extensive additions and revisions to Kondo [2021].

Inspired by Sobhy's point of view, this paper defines this way of narrating as "the less elaborated narrative." This can also be applied to politicians' recent discourse on *turāth*, Pharaonism, and security, as discussed below. In addition to this, it should be noted that although Sobhy's description is limited to state discourse, the same narrative is prevalent in civil discourse. In particular, *'arūsa* is representative of this. *'Arūsa* has been positively associated with various traditions (Islam, ancient Egyptian civilization, and even Christianity) from the late 20th century mainly by analogy with its form because its historical origins are ambiguous. Therefore, even though the discourses of *'arūsa* have been formed and maintained mainly on the part of the citizens, it has been very convenient for a series of Egyptian governments that have been promoting a national unity based on "authentic Egyptians" with historical continuity from ancient times to the present.

a. *'Arūsa al-Mawlid* as Popular Art

First, we will show specifically the key concepts commonly used in *'arūsa* discourse, mainly since the second half of the 20th century, and the similarity of their relationship to the state discourse.

'Arūsa has been frequently described in the form of three connected concepts: *sha'bī*, *turāth*, and *aṣāla*. In particular, the three words appear together in art ("popular art," *al-fann al-sha'bī*).[8] The concepts of *sha'bī*, *turāth*, and *aṣāla* are of great importance in the history of Egyptian thought and national identity. In addition, they also represent "the less elaborated narrative." I will show that there is vast room for interpretation of each concept for Egyptians as well as the relationship between the three.

First, I overview 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nabawī al-Shāl's view of *'arūsa* in his book, *'Arūsa al-Mawlid* [1967].[9] al-Shāl, in this work, defines popular art as a prolific and varied production [made] in the raw materials (*khāmāt*), methods, and behaviors of poetry, literature, song, dance, painting, and the practical arts for profit [al-Shāl 1967: 12]. Furthermore, he argues that all popular art forms have creative authenticity (*aṣāla*), and popular art is a microcosm of human life, inherited through time from one generation to the next with a deep and immense heritage (*turāth*) [al-Shāl 1967: 12, 13]. The definition clearly shows that the *aṣāla* and *turāth* are regarded as essential components of popular art. Al-Farmāwī's [2020] view of *'arūsa* also seems similar to al-Shāl's perception. He argues in terms of the concept of "Collective Mind (*al-'aql al-jam'ī*)" that *'arūsa* embodies the spirit and heritage of the people of the popular

8 The Arabic word *fann*, meaning "art," can be translated not only as "art" but also as "technique" or "craft," as in the Latin-derived English word "art," and can also mean some method or manner, as in "—art," "—ology" [Wehr 1993: 852–853]. In Egypt today, the word is also widely used to describe traditional handicrafts.

9 This book describing *'arūsa* as popular art is so famous that it is still frequently quoted in newspapers [al-Dusūqī 2021].

classes [al-Farmāwī 2020: 22].[10]

b. *Sha'bī*

Next, we will lay out the three concepts individually. First, I explain the concept of "*sha'bī*/popular." Although *sha'bī* seems merely the adjectival form of the noun *sha'b*, its meaning is too ambiguous to explain precisely what it means.[11] When Samuli Schielke explained *mawlid* in terms of *sha'bī*, he asserted, "It is not clear at all… what makes these things [in *mawlid*] popular [*sha'bī*]" [Schielke 2012: 138]. Many scholars like Diane Singerman and Schielke argued that "*sha'bī* is a relative concept that tends to be defined in terms of the 'popular (*sha'b*)' group as opposed to other groups" [Singerman 1995: 11].[12] Based on this, Schielke explains that "[p]opular is a relational category based on a general scheme of hegemonic, orthodox, 'high' culture as opposed to subaltern, heterodox, 'low' culture" [Schielke 2012: 139]. Thus, *sha'bī*/being popular is positioned on the basis of an ambiguous contrast between the two poles of "wealthy and Westernized Egyptians" and "Egyptians, who are poor but continue to live an indigenous way of life." As a result, *sha'bī* as an ambivalent concept evokes both positive and negative values, depending on the subject or social class that refers to *sha'bī*. Some people refer to it as "naive" and "pure," and others refer as "simple" and "ignorant."

First, as for negative value, "it can imply being poor-quality, grossly impoverished, unsophisticated, and downright uncouth" [Peterson 2008: 4]. Toriyama Junko states that *sha'bī* is consistently derogatory in everyday life [Toriyama 2022: 130]. On the other hand, at least in Egyptian academia studying local customs and practices as "folklore"[13] and the field of "popular art," all negative meanings have vanished [cf. Reynolds 2007: 26]. Furthermore, even for

10 In addition, Egyptian artists have recognized *'arūsa* as a popular art since the first half of the 20th century. For example, the First International Congress of Popular Arts, held in Prague in 1928, was organized by the International Commission for Intellectual Cooperation "to promote the interests of science and to realize its ideal of bringing the peoples of the world into closer contact" [English Folk Dance + Song Society 1928: 49]. Egyptian artist Muḥammad Nājī said in this congress, "[Y]ou see popular art around the mosque on days of celebrations and on the *mawlid* (Prophet's birthday). Here it appears in its original purity, in that it takes the form of dolls made of sugar [*'arūsa*]. And those figures representing shapes and animals set out on banks of wooden shelves look so wonderful — the children stare at them, their hearts yearn for them" [Naghi 2018: 68, 70]. Although the term heritage is not found in his discourse, it is associated with the context of the people and with "original purity," or authenticity.

11 Historically, the concept of "*sha'bī*/popular" is said to have originally derived from the Arabic word *baladī*, which has a primary geographical meaning based on the *ḥāra* (city block) of the city and is translated as "local, traditional" [El-Messiri 1978: 54, 58]. *Ibn al-balad* (the Son of the Country), a class rooted in *baladī* people, is said to have come into use after the 19th century [Armbrust 1996: 26] and seems to have been used longer than *sha'bī*. Instead, *sha'bī* is said to have come into use during the Nasser period [El-Messiri 1978: 46; Podeh 2011: 76; Sonbol 2000: 129], but it is unclear when it was first used.

12 However, "*sha'b*" is sometimes used in political contexts to refer broadly to "the people" and does not always correspond to those who attribute *sha'bī* [Armbrust 1996: 226 n. 25].

13 The Arab concept of "folklore" includes folk heritage (*al-turāth al-sha'bī*) and folk art (*al-funūn al-sha'bīya*) and is broadly divided into "oral arts" (poetry, proverbs, etc.), "musical arts" (folk songs, musical instruments, etc.), "material arts" (local architecture, costumes, jewelry, etc.), and customs and traditions ("*'ādāt wa taqālīd*," marriage, birth rituals, festivals, etc.) [Reynolds 2007: 26].

those who pursue such *sha'bī* practices, *sha'bī* has only positive value as a symbol of Egyptian historical continuity and authenticity [e.g., al-Shāl 1967; al-Farmāwī 2020].[14] Therefore, it is natural that in the discourse considering *'arūsa* as *sha'bī*, *'arūsa* is not described negatively at all. Although the current state discourse used rather the concepts of *turāth* and *aṣāla* discussed below than *sha'bī*, it is important to note the fact that *sha'bī* is first described in an entirely positive manner and then this term relates the other two concepts with *'arūsa.* It is because this relation suggests that *sha'bī* as a positive term enables Egyptian citizens to use *'arūsa* images positively as a whole and prevent conflict and controversy about *'arūsa* not only between the state and citizens but also among themselves.

c. *Turāth*

Next, what is *turāth*? Today, *turāth* generally refers to cultural heritage [Mansour 2021: 101]. Historically, popular heritage (*turāth sha'bī*) was closely associated with Arab nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s. After the decline of Arab nationalism with the defeat in the Third Middle East War (1967), the concept of "heritage (*turāth*)" has gained prominence as an ideology for national integration [e.g., Mansour 2021: 101; Salvatore 1995]. Above all, "*turāth*" was an important concept that defined the ideological background of cultural activities in contemporary Egypt. According to Jessica Winegar [2006], discussing artistic activity and its ideological background in Egypt, in the field of art, "the term [heritage] can include images, techniques, and actions from ancient Egypt through the Coptic and Islamic periods to contemporary popular art" [Winegar 2006: 98]. *Turāth* has always been a key concept in arguing the continuity of the Egyptian people from ancient times to the present.

In addition, *turāth* has been used frequently in national discourse and activities recently. For example, each year since 2019, a large handicraft exhibition called "Our Heritage (*turāthnā*)" has been held by the "Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise Development Agency (MSMEDA) (*Jihāz Tanmiya al-Mashrū'āt al-Mutawassiṭa wa al-Ṣaghīra wa Mutanāhiya al-Ṣighar*)" under the leadership of President al-Sisi [Mounir 2021]. The situation has been reported in various media ['Izzat 2021]. The exhibition aims to propagate the historical authenticity of Egypt from ancient times to the present, emphasizing the aspect of handmade (*yadawī*) by Egyptian artisans. It is worth mentioning that several gift shops sold *'arūsa* goods at the exhibitions in 2021 and 2022.

14 The similarity that can be observed from the things and objects considered *sha'bī* is "historicity." Based on *'arūsa* and other popular images, their scope seems to be defined by the depth of their association with historicity rather than by the geographical division into "cities," as *baladī* usually suggests. Regarding geography, the *sha'bī* objects are widely found throughout Egypt and do not necessarily relate to a limited space or place. In this respect, although *sha'bī* overlaps largely with a national identity, which considers farmers (*fallāḥīn*) and rural villages as the original landscape of Egypt [e.g., Selim 2004: 2-3], they are not entirely identical.

d. *Aṣāla*

The *turāth* started to be closely associated with "authenticity (*aṣāla*)" in the wave of ideological rethinking and Islamic revival after the 1967 defeat in the Arab–Israeli War. Abu-Lughod and Walter Armbrust discuss the Egyptian ideal that Egyptians should be Westernized and learn modern education without losing the traditional "essence" or authenticity [Abu-Lughod 2005: 149; Armbrust 1996: 22]. Referring again to the case of art, *aṣāla* is frequently used in Arab art to emphasize the characteristics of a particular region, being said to derive from anti-Western sentiments [Shabout 2007: 42]. It has also been noted that artists in Egypt tend to use *aṣāla* to represent the "authentic" Egyptians through art and to educate the public [Winegar 2006; 2014; Kane 2013; Ramadan 2013; cf. Seggerman 2019].

'Arūsa is mentioned in terms of *aṣāla* frequently. It is worth noting that "*'arūsa* made in China" is often criticized by local people from this point of view. In the 1990s, the situation of *'arūsa* has changed. Although *'arūsa* is originally made of sugar, in addition to this, plastic *'arūsa* began to appear in the market during this period. They are composed of many body parts imported from China and are put together and decorated in factories in Egypt. It is estimated that this form of manufacturing became established under global relationships in the 1990s. Today, plastic *'arūsa* is sold in various parts of Egypt, replacing sugar *'arūsa*.

Plastic *'arūsa* has faced criticisms from the beginning to the present. One criticism is that plastic *'arūsa* is made in China [e.g., Rashād 2021]. Some locals suggest that because plastic *'arūsa* is made in China, it does not ensure Egyptian "authenticity." A newspaper article said that the "brilliance" of *'arūsa* has been lost with the advent of plastic *'arūsa* [Hindī 1999].[15] Thus, the criticism of plastic *'arūsa* as Chinese suggests the people's perception that *'arūsa* is, in the first place, the embodiment of authentic Egyptianness.

As discussed above, the terms *sha'bī*, *turāth*, and *aṣāla* are still widely used in Egypt. As explained, the state began using *turāth* to justify its policies more frequently. However, the content of these three concepts is seldom elaborated. Nor is there any consensus of fixed meaning among the people. It is always less elaborated what *sha'bī* refers to, what *turāth* means precisely, what kind of people embody Egyptian authenticity, and which practices are expressions of such authenticity.

e. Relating *'Arūsa* to Ancient Egypt

Egyptians have associated *'arūsa* with ancient Egypt, Islam, and Christianity. In the following, I will explain how the current state describes ancient Egypt, Islam, and Christianity and how

15 However, given the facts, this criticism is one-sided. This is because, although the elements and some of the ornaments are imported from China, it is the local Egyptians who assemble them and make the *'arūsa* in their factories in Egypt. In light of this fact, a plastic *'arūsa* could be made in China or Egypt, depending on how each individual interprets it from a different angle. If one emphasizes that the element is made in China, it can be said to be "made in China," while if one focuses on where it is assembled and the people who do it, it can be said to be "made in Egypt."

the ways that citizens have associated *'arūsa* with ancient Egypt, Islam, and Christianity are quite similar.

As noted above, the connection between ancient Egypt and contemporary peoples, both state and civil, has been recognized more strongly than ever in recent years. Of particular note are the related activities of the state: On April 13, 2021, a parade was held at the Egyptian Museum, located in Tahrir Square in Cairo, to transport 22 mummies to the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization in Fustat. The parade was splendidly held with live broadcasts on YouTube on the Egyptian Ministry of Archaeology and Tourism's official account, and in addition there were ancient Egyptian dances at archaeological sites in other regions, such as Luxor, and songs by popular singers. Many people outside Egypt viewed this streaming. In addition, on November 25, 2021, a ceremony was held to inaugurate the 3-kilometer-long Sphinx Avenue connecting the Luxor and Karnak Temples in Luxor City. This ceremony was the culmination of the excavation projects of Sphinx Avenue that have been ongoing since the 2010s to promote pharaonic national pride and tourism. President al-Sisi attended both ceremonies. The image of ancient Egypt as the center of the tourism industry has long been widely promoted and disseminated as part of Egypt's national policy. At the same time, for Egyptian citizens, ancient Egypt is already a firm part of their identity [Ibraheem 2023].

Of course, *'arūsa* has also been associated with ancient Egypt. Many Egyptians and foreigners regard *'arūsa* as an ancient heritage from the Pharaonic period [e.g., Blanchard 1917: 189; al-Shāl 2004: 44]. For example, Saphinaz-Amal Naguib, a researcher of heritage studies and museology, states that the form of *'arūsa* was initially derived from a pharaonic relic, and its symbolic meaning changed from fertility to purity; Naguib also notes that the red-colored *'arūsa* represents a girl who is now able to bear children [Naguib 1986]. In addition, claiming that *'arūsa* is associated with Egyptian mythology is prevalent [e.g., Sāmī 2019; Majīd 2015: 225]. These discourses claim that *'arūsa* was inspired by the god Isis and the knight by her husband, Osiris.

What is clear is that describing something rooted in ancient Egypt has relied on "the less elaborated narrative" since Pharaonism appeared. Not only the Pharaonism that Coptic nationalists relied on in the first half of the 20th century [Miyokawa 2017] but also the discourses that suggest a connection to ancient Egypt usually ignore specific investigations of artifacts and sites, archaeological evidence, and historical processes. Naguib's explanation is not based on rigorous typological analysis in archaeology but a simple comparison of materials that existed at very different times. Such attempts are usually made only to show the continuity of Egyptians between past and present in a less elaborate form.

f. Relating *'Arūsa* to Islam

How is the *'arūsa al-mawlid* given Islamic connotations? From the early 20th century, accounts of non-Muslim foreigners who observed and studied the *'arūsa* tended to treat it as

an "idol forbidden by Islam" [e.g., Butcher 1910: 171; Sladen 1910: 225; Blanchard 1917: 189; Kane 2013: 85]. However, not only do these accounts offer little corroboration by local Egyptians, but they also treat the Qur'an and Islam in an essentialist manner, often conflating the prohibition of idolatry with the prohibition of figurative representations of living creatures. It must be said that they expressed a typical Orientalist understanding of Islam.

In the first place, references to *ʻarūsa* in terms of idols in Islam by Egyptians have not existed until recently, as will be discussed below. Moreover, the number of Egyptian discourses directly relating *ʻarūsa* to Islam is relatively few compared to other major discourses relating to *shaʻbī* and *turāth*. The Islamic scholars, ulamas, too, rarely mention *ʻarūsa*.[16] In my investigations, talking about *ʻarūsa* from an Islamic perspective was usually a passive topic that only came up if I asked. Indeed, when asked, many people describe *ʻarūsa* as Islamic, such as the "product of Islamic civilization (*ḥaḍāra Islāmīya*)" [November 21, 2017, as heard in the Bāb al-Shaʻrīya district in Cairo]. However, these statements seemed to rely on the understanding that *ʻarūsa* is Islamic because "its origins are rooted in the Islamic era." In other words, it does not mean they rely on the precise historical facts and processes about *ʻarūsa*.[17]

In general, there are three major oral narratives about the origins of *ʻarūsa* among Egyptians [al-Farmāwī 2020: 40; Sāmī 2019; Majīd 2015: 224].[18] According to one legend, one day during the Fatimid period, when the caliph Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh left the palace with his wife, a craftsman was impressed by his wife's gorgeous attire with her jasmine crown and made a sketch. It is said that this episode was the origin of *ʻarūsa al-mawlid*. One legend also says that the origin of *ʻarūsa al-mawlid* is derived from the Fatimid caliphs' encouragement and support of young people to marry during the Prophet's *mawlid*. Another legend says that it originated from the custom of the Fatimid caliph al-Mustanṣir, who rewarded men for conquering tribes by offering them tribe women to marry. This custom is said to have come to be practiced along with the Prophet's *mawlid* over time. In addition, an *ʻāmmīya* textbook argues that Abū Zayd, the hero of the famous Egyptian adventure tale Banū Hilāl (*Sīra Banī Hilāl*), was the model for the knight counterpart of *ʻarūsa al-mawlid* [Shawqī 2003: 11]. There is agreement that the *ʻarūsa* originates in the Fatimid period (when the *mawlid* became a state-sponsored festival).[19] However, what is important here is that though many different views

16 If one searches for "*mawlid*" or "*ʻarūsa al-mawlid*" on the page that lists fatwas on the *Dār al-iftāʼ* website, there are fatwas on *mawlid* as well as fatwas on the permissibility of consuming sweets in *mawlid*. However, there is no fatwa mentioning *ʻarūsa al-mawlid*. This confirms the low importance of the relationship between *ʻarūsa al-mawlid* and Islam among Egyptian Islamic scholars.

17 During the fieldwork, I could not hear the ideas of the Salafis directly. Since Salafis are critical of the *mawlid* and, therefore, are not likely to participate in it, there were few opportunities for me to encounter Salafis.

18 The origins of these three legends are briefly summarized in an article by freelance writer Aḥmad Samīr Sāmī, which suggests that these legends are popular in public [Sāmī 2019].

19 Even though no pre-modern historical sources explicitly mention the existence of *ʻarūsa*, dolls made of sugar had already appeared in the Fatimid period historical sources. For example, the Fatimid historian

exist, they are not historical facts but only legends based on "the less elaborated narrative."

Al-Shāl adopts a similar narrative. At the beginning of his article "*'Arūsa al-Mawlid*, Created by the Fatimids a Thousand Years Ago" published in the Egyptian weekly *Niṣf al-Dunyā* [2004], he criticizes the "Orientalists (*mustashriqūn*)" for attributing the origin of *'arūsa al-mawlid* to Greek Tanagra dolls (terra-cotta female figures made in Greece) and French dolls. According to him, the costumes and decorations of *'arūsa* originated in Egypt and cannot be separated from the "Islamic heritage (*turāth Islāmī*)" and "profound popular philosophy" [al-Shāl 2004: 43]. The main methods al-Shāl uses here to prove the connection between *'arūsa* and Islam rely on when *'arūsa* first appeared and the simple analogy with "the representative of Islam." For example, al-Shāl claims that *'arūsa* is an "Islamic heritage" because *'arūsa* was invented in the past Islamic dynasties in Egypt [al-Shāl 2004: 43]. He states that the sugar *'arūsa* does not use the black color because the Abbasid dynasty, which conflicted with the Fatimid dynasty, used black to represent it, and therefore the Fatimid people disliked black [al-Shāl 2004: 44]. On the same page, he also mentions that *'arūsa* is also associated with Sufism. According to him, the decorations of *'arūsa* mixed with gold and silver paper symbolize the rags worn by the dervishes (Sufis).

Al-Shāl uses such a simple analogical approach whenever he claims that *'arūsa* is a popular and Islamic heritage and originates in Egypt. It is important to emphasize that al-Shāl and other Egyptians do not argue that Islamic heritage is Islamic "because it is derived from the Qur'an and Sunna." Furthermore, I do not intend to criticize this analogical approach as "erroneous." Rather, as discussed below, this "less elaborated narrative" leads various Egyptians to consider *'arūsa* positively and has contributed significantly to the broad commercial use of *'arūsa*'s image among citizens in the late 2010s.

g. Relating *'Arūsa* to Christianity

'Arūsa is sometimes mentioned in connection to Christian history in Egypt. In my fieldwork, I found that *'arūsa* was sold in a confectioner's shop run by Christians in Alexandria, who described *'arūsa* as Christian [November 14, 2018, hearing in Alexandria]. Sāmī Amīn, a Coptic designer and the founder of a leather goods brand for the wealthier, also said, "The Mouled [*mawlid*] doll for instance originally dates back to the pharaohs; however, it was later updated to resemble Virgin Mary before it finally became associated with the prophet's birth" [Yasser 2017]. The term "updated" clearly indicates the recognition that *'arūsa* have continuity

Musabbiḥī (977-1029) writes that banquets are decorated with sugar dolls (*timthāl*), ornaments, and palaces [Sato 2015: 58]. In addition, Nāṣir Khusraw, who visited Egypt during Ramadan in 1049, saw trees, leaves, and dolls made of sugar at a feast held under the Fatimid caliph Mustansir [Nāṣir-i Khusraw. 1986: 57]. According to Sato Tsugitaka, the sultan organized sugar doll processions during Ramadan in the Mamluk period. Al-Maqrīzī describes the appearance of "hanging sugar candy (*'ilāqa*)" of various animals during Ramadan [Sato 2015: 167, 182]. Thus, sugar dolls have historically existed in Egypt, although not in the *mawlid*, but in Ramadan.

from the Pharaonic period.[20] What is more significant is that Christianity and Islam are narrated under continuity in the Christian discourse about *'arūsa.* Avoiding the disconnection between the two religions are observed in the following case: An article titled "*'Arūsa al-Mawlid*: Coptic or Fatimid?" shows that some researchers argue that it originated in the Pharaonic or Coptic period, and yet others that it originated in the Fatimid period [Akhbārak 2014]. However, despite the name of this article, no conclusion is drawn on whether it is of Christian origin or Fatimid origin, thus it remains ambiguous.

Discourses relating *'arūsa* to Christianity seem to consider ancient Egyptian, Christian, and Islamic periods as a continuity rather than a rupture or disconnection. Although there is no direct relationship between the state and the Christian citizens in terms of *'arūsa* until today, such discourse of continuity from the past to the present through "the less elaborated narrative" allows us to imagine an affinity between the Christian citizen and the state in nationalism. Christian citizens can incorporate themselves into Egyptian history through *'arūsa*. Moreover, because Coptics have been regarded as an essential part of national unity by a secularist state that advocates religious harmony and equality [e.g., Tadros and Habib 2022: 6–7; Rowe 2020: 356], such an understanding of *'arūsa* by Christians is also favorable to the national integration of the state, though substantial discrimination continues [Sobhy 2023: 146–147].

h. Citizens' Nationalism Independent of the State in *'Arūsa* Discourses from the Late 20th Century

I can argue that discourses of *'arūsa* since the second half of the 20th century, which I have examined so far, have rarely been directly intervened in by the state and were constructed primarily on the citizen's side. Nevertheless, it is certain that there is a high affinity between the state's discourse of Egyptianness and that of *'arūsa*, characterized by "the less elaborated narrative." Although it is difficult in this article to precisely explain this high affinity through causal relationships, it is possible to interpret it in the following way. As discussed in Section 1 in terms of the continuity and rupture of nationalism, the various nationalisms that have emerged in Egypt since the last 25 years of the 19th century, both national and civic, have continued to play a large role in the discourse and activities in Egypt up to the present. In this process, *'arūsa* has been described in association with various meanings from different ideological backgrounds. Then *'arūsa* could absorb many meanings because of its ambiguous origins and history. Each meaning did not exclude or conflict with the other and cumulated gradually as "the less elaborated narrative." As a result, an environment has been created in which Muslims, Christians, and even Pharaonists can view *'arūsa* in a positive light.

20 One can speculate that this explanation is due to the influence of Pharaonism that Copts espoused in the first half of the 20th century [Miyokawa 2017; Guirguis 2017: 46–50]. There is also a statement that Christians also purchase *'arūsa* and knights.

3. The Manifestations and Spread of *'Arūsa al-Mawlid*

Next, after overviewing the manifestations and spread of *'arūsa* in the late 2010s, I will analyze the factors that led to these phenomena in terms of a rupture or break with the nationalism of the past, that is, the reinforcement of security nationalism by the state.

a. Some Aspects of the Manifestations and Spread of *'Arūsa al-Mawlid*

'Arūsa al-mawlid has long been produced, sold, and consumed, mainly during the Prophet's *mawlid*, up until today. However, while the local Egyptians have taken it for granted, people hardly buy and consume it. Moreover, it has been perceived to be protected because of its decline [e.g., Sonbol 2015]. However, in the 2010s, this situation gradually changed. *'Arūsa al-mawlid*, as the name implies, was inseparable from *mawlid* (particularly the Prophet's *mawlid*). Today, however, the representation of *'arūsa* can be observed beyond the place and period in which the *mawlid* is publicly celebrated as a festival. Artworks featuring *'arūsa* frequently appear in exhibitions at many art galleries.[21] Gift stores selling *'arūsa* goods for the wealthy have also increased recently.[22] It is also one of the evidences that Usāma al-Farmāwī's book, *'Arūsa al-mawlid in Quwaysna: A Study in Material Culture* (*'Arūsa al-mawlid fī quwaysnā: dirāsa fī al-thaqāfa al-māddīya*), published in 2020, won a prize in the Humanities category at the 52nd Cairo International Book Fair [Milījī and Jāwīsh 2021].

To explain the manifestations and spread of *'arūsa*, I must indicate that in recent years, during the *mawlid*, particularly the Prophet's *mawlid*, confectionery companies have increasingly used *'arūsa* images in various media, including on boxes of *mawlid* sweets and advertising. For example, El-Abd Patisserie (*Ḥalwānī al-'Abd*),[23] a prominent Egyptian confectionery company, made extensive use of *'arūsa* images in the design of its products. The oldest El-Abd store, located near Ṭal'at Ḥarb Street in central Cairo, which usually sells sweets in special boxes on the occasion of the Prophet's *mawlid*, shows that the presence of *'arūsa* gradually increased from 2014 to 2019 (see Photos 3 and 4).[24]

21 For 2018–2019, several art galleries located on the island of Gezira, Cairo, have held exhibitions that include works featuring *'arūsa* motifs: The exhibitions of Hasan Rashed (Gallery Grant, 2019), El Husseiny Aly (UBUNTU Art gallery, 2019), Mohamed el-Tahan (Nout Art Gallery, 2019), Kamal Yaknour (Ebdaa Art Gallery, 2018 and Al-Bab-Selim Gallery, 2019).

22 *'Arūsa* goods are increasingly being sold in gift shops in Zamalek, Ma'adi, and downtown gift stores in Cairo. In these stores, even the cheapest *'arūsa* key chains and magnets cost more than 25 pounds, and the most expensive items cost 3,680 pounds, such as leather bags with *'arūsa* images for sale to the wealthy.

23 The company established its first store on Ṭal'at Ḥarb Street in Cairo in 1974, and as of 2023 has a total of 11 stores in Cairo and Giza [https://elabdfoods.com/en/Content/index?id=3, accessed 2023-10-04]. In addition to *mawlid* sweets, the company also sells cakes, breads, biscuits sprinkled with powdered sugar called *kaḥk*, nuts, ice cream, and other regular products. The stores, including the first one on Tala'at Harb Street, are always filled with people during opening hours.

24 In addition, El-Abd's *'arūsa* image became more prevalent through unauthorized use by confectioners, while other upscale confectioners (such as Etoile Patisserie and La Poire) with stores in Cairo began to create


Photos 3 (left) and 4 (right). The outside display shelves of El-Abd before the Prophet's *mawlid* in 2014 (left, photo by the author on December 22, 2014) and the same outside display shelves before the Prophet's *mawlid* in 2019 (right, photo by the author on November 3, 2019).

In parallel, it is essential to discuss the increase in the purchase of *mawlid* sweets (*ḥalāwa*/*ḥalwā al-mawlid*)[25] from the late 1990s to the present. According to *Ahram Online*, El-Abd's owner, Haitham Al-Abd (Haytham al-'Abd), and its marketing manager mentioned that the *mawlid* sweets had once declined but revived in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Many factors (improving the quality of sweets, raw materials, and the hygienic environment for selling sweets and using individual wrapping, distributing them in supermarkets and online, and promoting sweets on Instagram and TV commercials) were said to have contributed to the revival of *mawlid* sweets.

Although Al-Abd and marketers strongly emphasize their company's contribution, it is unclear how accurate the information is, and the contributions of other sugar companies may have been underestimated. However, it is certain that the growing purchase and consumption of *mawlid* sweets play a significant role in the spread of *'arūsa al-mawlid* because every confectioner uses the *'arūsa* image for their commodities during the Prophet's *mawlid*. In other words, the increase in the purchase and consumption of *mawlid* sweets means the spread of *'arūsa* image and the manifestation of *'arūsa* in public. Every year, before the Prophet Muhammad's *mawlid* on the 12th of *Rabī' al-Awwal*, the third month of the Islamic calendar, *mawlid* sweets start to be sold throughout Egypt. During this period, people take home many sugar sweets boxes, some carrying several boxes of the El-Abd filled with *mawlid* sweets, and, most importantly, we can easily find *'arūsa* images printed on many boxes, wrapping paper, plastic bags for *mawlid* sweets.

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their own *'arūsa* image and use it for their advertising and packaging.

25 It generally refers to nuts and seeds, the main ingredients hardened with liquefied sugar. Both *ḥalāwa* and *ḥalwā* are derived from the same root (ḥ-l-w), meaning "sweet/sweetness" [Wehr 1993: 236–237]. In Egypt, *ḥalāwa* simply means sweet or pleasant, while *ḥalawīyāt* refers to sweets [Hinds and Badawi 1986].

b. Interpreting the Manifestations and Spread of *'Arūsa al-Mawlid*: A Viewpoint of the Strengthening of Security Nationalism

So, how can we analyze why the spread of *'arūsa* occurred in the late 2010s? It can be explained primarily by the reinforcement of security nationalism. In Section 1, I focused on the issue that citizens have not been able to express any disagreement against the government since the late 2010s. However, while national security has had a severe impact on the citizens' lives, it has brought benefits concerning the use of the *'arūsa* image among citizens.

To illustrate this point in an abstract sense, I describe security nationalism from the perspective of "the less elaborated narrative." For security nationalism, "the less elaborated narrative" is crucial. First, security nationalism itself was made by "the less elaborated narrative." For example, security nationalism is the product of the less elaborated objectification of internal and external threats such as "terrorists" and "foreign agents" as the "other." Lucia Ardovini and Simon Mabon explained as follows, "[t]he definition of 'terrorism' under the 2014 anti-terrorism law is extremely broad and includes any 'act' that might obstruct the work of public officials, institutions, and so on" [Ardovini and Mabon 2020: 470]. This definition of terrorism clearly indicates that the current state is creating an environment in which it can arbitrarily expand the targets of its interventions, depending on "the less elaborated narrative."[26]

Second, security nationalism intends to make public discourses and expressions less elaborated. It forces citizens to avoid clear and distinguishable discourses based on systematized ideologies or beliefs and not to create political discourses and expressions for the same purpose, such as protests against the government. Specifically, since the late 2010s, national discourses have frequently used the concepts of *turāth* and *aṣāla*, relating them to ancient Egypt. In addition, on the citizens' side, a commercial risk occurred along with stronger security because public discourses and expressions, if they are distinguishable and regarded as based on a single ideology or creed, can easily be used to justify the state's intervention. It is worth pointing out that during the Prophet's *mawlid*, many companies usually adopted for their *mawlid* commodities not "Islamic" images, such as various Sufi practices, but "Egyptian" images, such as small Ferris wheels in amusement parks, *tannūra* (whirling) dancers, knight statues, and other figures, especially *'arūsa*. In other words, the *mawlid* was rather represented as an "Egyptian" festival, even though the *mawlid* is a religious (Islamic or Christian) celebration as well.

In sum, it is natural to assume that the reinforcement of security nationalism has a

26 In fact, some have suggested that attempts to achieve such security are implemented in a less elaborated form. Tadros and Habib state, "The security apparatuses operate in an opaque manner, often mediating institutional relations through informal mechanisms of power" [Tadros and Habib 2022: 2].

positive influence on the increased use of the image of *'arūsa*, and thus the spread of *'arūsa*. As discussed in detail in the previous section, pre-modern historical sources up to the 19th century failed to provide a clear picture of the history of *'arūsa al-mawlid*, but this lack of historical evidence was consequently advantageous for *'arūsa* today. The ambiguous history encouraged the development of diverse and positive interpretations and explanations by various Egyptians. At present, this situation also enables citizens to avoid the intervention of national security because the "superficiality" and "ambiguity" of *'arūsa* do not create a clear discourse, conflict, or controversy based on established ideas and beliefs.

As discussed in Section 2, *'arūsa*'s discourses originally had an affinity with those of the Egyptianness promoted by the state, although each discourse was constructed and maintained independently. However, the reinforcement and expansion of national security in the late 2010s has changed this independent relationship, though indirectly. Security nationalism compelled citizens not to unite and made public discourses and expressions less elaborated than ever. For citizens to accommodate such a demand, they started to use *'arūsa*'s image as a representative of "the less elaborated narrative," leading to its spread. I can interpret this change in citizens' practice as implying not only an attempt for citizens to escape from state control or resist it but also a "pro-government" one to cooperate with state policy. In any case, it is certain that the current situation of *'arūsa* resulted from the mutual and positive relationship between the state and its citizens on nationalism.

4. The Intervention of Security Nationalism in the Discourse of *'Arūsa al-Mawlid*

In 2016, the Egyptian newspaper *al-Yawm al-Sābi'* presented a Salafi critique of *'arūsa* as an idol and a response to this criticism by Islamic intellectuals on the state's side ['Arafa 2016]. According to it, Nāṣir Raḍwān, a member of the Alexandria-based Salafist organization *al-Da'wa al-Salafīya*, wrote on his Facebook page, "There is a factory of idols of innovation [*bid'a*] next to my house," and claimed that the *'arūsa al-mawlid* is an idol (*aṣnām*) of the Quraysh tribe that was worshipped in the *Jāhilīya* period (pre-Islamic period), such as *Hubal*, *al-Lāt*, and *al-'Uzzā*. In contrast, 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Idrīs, the head of the Department of Comparative Fiqh at Azhar University, and 'Amr Ḥamrūsh, the Secretary of the Religious Committee of the Parliament (*al-Lajna al-Dīnīya bil-Barlamān*), argued that there is a big difference between the fact that the Quraysh regarded idols as gods and the fact that *'arūsa al-mawlid* (sugar *'arūsa* is assumed here) is consumed by people. The former is problematic and not the latter because there is an agreement that regarding idols as gods is forbidden. They argue that there should not be and that there is no reason to issue a fatwa banning the making, selling, and consuming of *'arūsa*.

In addition, in 2018, 'Iṣām al-Rūbī, the ulama of Azhar, said in a television interview that "some radicals (*mutashaddidūn*)" consider *'arūsa* and horses [knights] to be idols, but

such opinions are "exaggerated (*mughālāt*)" and "extremely ignorant (*jahl shadīd*)" and that the representations of *'arūsa* and the knight are not idols [al-Badawī 2018]. In parallel, the question of whether the purchase of *'arūsa* is *bid'a* has been raised: in 2019, the fatwa, "Is the Purchase of *'Arūsa al-Mawlid* or *Mawlid* Sweets *Bid'a*? According to [*Dār*] *al-Iftā'*, in This Case [It is] Desirable (*mustaḥabb*)" [Fawzī 2019], stated that the purchase of *'arūsa* and sweets are a desirable recommended practice (*mustaḥabban mandūban*) under the *maqāṣid*,[27] and it is outrageous to criticize them on the ground that there was no such practice in the early Islam. In 2021, according to *al-Waṭan*, the *Dār al-Iftā'*, the governmental fatwa organization, issued the fatwa of Shawqī Ibrāhīm 'Abd al-Karīm 'Allām, Grand Mufti of Egypt (*muftī al-diyār al-miṣrīya*) to "settle the dispute (*taḥsimu al-jadal*)" about the purchase of sweets and *'arūsa* during *mawlid* [Faraj 2021]. The article stated that although selling and buying them is permissible, rumors urging people not to buy *mawlid* sweets and *'arūsa al-mawlid* because they were idols led people to question whether it was permissible in Islam or not.[28]

Thus, it implies that with the spread of *'arūsa*, the image of *'arūsa* became a subject among local Muslims from an Islamic perspective and that those who perceived *'arūsa* and knights as idols, as Western tourists and foreign scholars have pointed out in the past, also appeared publicly. This paper will analyze the impact of this controversy on the discourse and representation of *'arūsa*, focusing on the transformation of "the less elaborated narrative." It is important to note that the actors who are alleged to have criticized *'arūsa* are the "Salafis" and "extremists," who are perceived as the most serious threat to national security, and that the criticisms were faced with fierce rebuttals from people and institutions on the side of the government, such as the ulama of Azhar, the head of the parliamentary committee, and the *Dār al-Iftā'*.[29]

First, it is difficult for us to imagine that these rebuttals were intended to preserve the traditional image of *'arūsa*, such as *turāth*, or "the less elaborated narrative" associated with it. This is because terms such as heritage and authenticity do not appear in the discourses. Moreover, it is also because if one responds to this exceptional criticism in order to preserve "the less elaborated narrative," "ignoring" is the most rational and effortless response. Ignoring prevents the public from recognizing the controversy through the media and spoiling "the less elaborated narrative." On the other hand, viewing this rebuttal from the perspective of national security is more instructive. As noted above, in Egypt today, any discourse, practice,

27 It means purpose or intention in Arabic, but here, it appears to refer to the *maqāṣid al-sharī'a* of Islamic law. The term refers to the idea that *sharī'a* is a certain system that encompasses purposes and objectives and that if that system is properly implemented, those objectives will also be achieved [Gleave 2012].

28 However, while the 'Allām's response in the article states that the purchase of sweets is a good sunna (*sunna ḥasana*), it does not say whether *'arūsa* is permitted.

29 While there is no doubt that Al-Azhar is basically on the side of the state under al-Sisi [Bano and Benadi 2018], there is also a desire for autonomy [Takemura 2023].

or expression deemed to lead to the criticism of the government is considered a challenge to national security. In particular, so-called "Salafis" and "extremists" are perceived as major threats. Thus, the fact that "Salafis" and "extremists" criticized something publicly transformed this topic into a matter of national security and a serious political issue for the state. The specific contents criticized were irrelevant to state intervention at first. In short, the objections appeared not because of the contents of the criticism but because of those who criticized.

It is worth noting here that previous articles on the Islamic justification of the Prophet's *mawlid* and *mawlid* sweets have similarly assumed "Salafis" and others as virtual enemies. For example, in a fatwa collection on the *Dār al-Iftā'* website, some fatwas answered about purchasing and consuming *mawlid* sweets. Of particular note is the fatwa that was inquired about on December 1, 2016, and answered by the ʻAllām, Grand Mufti of Egypt [ʻAllām 2016].[30] The question was how buying or giving sweets in the Prophet's *mawlid* is prescribed in Islam. In addition, it also indicated that some people consider *mawlid* sweets as idols (*aṣnām*), *bidʻa*, and *ḥarām*. To this question, ʻAllām says that it is lawful (*jā'iz*) to express joy (*faraḥ*) in *mawlid* by purchasing or giving sweets and that it is rather a desirable (*mustaḥabb*) or recommended act (*mandūb*) in the sight of God, and that it is not at all a *bidʻa* or idol (*aṣnām*) worthy of condemnation. The fact that the Grand Mufti issues this fatwa suggests that it is not merely an Islamic justification but also a highly political one, reflecting a national agenda. More importantly, a similar situation of "difficulties by critics" and "(legitimate) refutation of orthodox Islam by the state" had already appeared in the paper on topics related to *mawlid*. From this point, I can interpret that the controversy between the state and the "extremists" had already been constructed by expanding the distribution of *mawlid* sweets. Based on it, the same controversy about *ʻarūsa* occurred through the spread of *ʻarūsa*.

In any case, as can be seen from specific contents above, such as the *maqāṣid*, the controversy over *ʻarūsa* deviates from "the less elaborated narrative," which was crucial when Egyptians referred to *ʻarūsa*. This was the result of two choices. As noted above, to maintain "the less elaborated narrative," it would have been most reasonable for the state to ignore such criticism. Nevertheless, "Salafis" and "radicals" could hardly be ignored in current national security because it is more important to the government, which harshly promotes security nationalism. Therefore, the latter was chosen, and a thorough ethical and logical condemnation was carried out to eliminate the targets considered a threat to national security based on a zero-tolerance policy. As a result, when people describe *ʻarūsa* in terms of Islam, "the less elaborated narrative" seems to have become less acceptable to them than it used to be. It is ironic that, at first, security nationalism promoted "the less elaborated narrative," leading to the manifestations and spread of *ʻarūsa*, but over time, this nationalism ended up spoiling "the less elaborated narrative" of *ʻarūsa*, although the changes about *ʻarūsa* were partly the "pro-

30 Note that the day of the Prophet's *mawlid* in Egypt in 2016 was on December 12.

government" practices of citizens.

5. Conclusion

This paper discussed the changing relationship between citizens' nationalism and the state's nationalism in the discourse and expression of *'arūsa*. Until recently, discourses and representations about *'arūsa* formed by citizens have had a high affinity with the ideology promoted by the state. They were characterized by "the less elaborated narrative" that avoided clear explanations, conflicts, and divisions among citizens. Moreover, the reinforcement and expansion of national security since the late 2010s required more than ever that public discourse and expression be "less elaborated," both in the state and citizens. This change led to the spread of *'arūsa*, the representative of "the less elaborated narrative," in various aspects of civil life. However, the spread of *'arūsa* has also given rise to criticism from the "Salafis" and "extremists." These "Salafis" and "extremists" were the most alarming targets for the current state based on the principle of security nationalism. Therefore, it was inevitable for the state to oppose them. Moreover, reflected by the zero-tolerance policy, the counterargument was so fundamental that it could separate clearly between the state and the "Salafis" and "extremists" as "others."

From the state's point of view, this case shows that no matter how crucial "the less elaborated narrative" is as a key component of security nationalism, it can easily be ignored if it violates the principle of zero tolerance security. On the other hand, from the citizens' side, the use of the image of *'arūsa* and its spread can be seen as a "pro-government" practice and a "pro-government" way to adapt to the current national security through "the less elaborated narrative." Nevertheless, the reinforcement of security triggered a dispute between Salafis and the state, resulting in the degeneration of the cooperative foundation of "the less elaborated narrative" in the discourse of *'arūsa* in Islam.

Based on this discussion, The following points can be made about current Egyptian nationalism:

1. The citizens, as well as the state, developed their own nationalism until now. The nationalism observed in the discourse and expression of *'arūsa* was, until the last few years, constructed and maintained independently of the state's intervention and the relationship between citizens and the state.
2. Even under the state's total oppression, citizens not only resist and protest against the state but, as the spread of *'arūsa* shows, they may also take their own nationalistic practices in favor of the state.
3. Such "pro-government" nationalistic practices do not always go smoothly. On the contrary, they can have other results than those envisioned by the public. In the case

of *'arūsa*, the contingent event of the sharpened Salafi vs. state dispute endangered the "less elaborated narrative," as a characteristic of *'arūsa*'s discourse on which the pro-government attempt was carried out.

4. For the current Egyptian state, many different forms of nationalism are worth using to justify its governance, but only security nationalism is placed at the top of the hierarchy.

Finally, I will present future issues related to this paper. Since the controversies about *'arūsa* presented in Section 4 are only a few examples associated with Islam, it is difficult to estimate their future impact on other major discourses of *'arūsa* and civil life. One possible scenario is that this case will lead to more explicit public meanings and expressions of *'arūsa* or that the spread of the *'arūsa* image will continue by "the less elaborated narrative" as before. In the case of the former, the situation can be created that 'arūsa is treated negatively or state intervention increases, leading to slowing the tide of the commercial use of *'arūsa* images. However, in any case, this is speculation, and further investigation is necessary.

In a theoretical context, as mentioned earlier, the concept of "security nationalism" should be elaborated in further research in terms of not only "security" but also "nationalism." In political science, it is important to discuss the relationship between security nationalism and "securitization." Political science sometimes uses the concept of "securitization" to explain the state's focus on national security, including Egypt [e.g., Russell 2022; Moussa and Yokota 2023]. According to it, the threat to national security is continually refined by actors such as the state and citizens [Moussa and Yokota 2023: 241]. Simultaneously, we should incorporate the concept of security nationalism into current nationalism studies. In this respect, we should pay attention to "national indifference." Recent research discusses nationalism from the perspective of interrelationships between nationalists and people indifferent to national identity [van Ginderachter and Fox 2019]. Interestingly, recent political science and nationalism studies both emphasize the constructive process based on interrelationships among various actors. Therefore, discussing security nationalism in terms of its constructivity, such as the product of cooperation or conflict between the state and citizens shown in this article, will be able to contribute to both fields.

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