# Religious Minorities in the Middle East

## Domination,

## Self-Empowerment,

## Accommodation

Edited by

Anh Nga Longva & Anne Sofie Roald

**BRILL**

Religious Minorities in the Middle East

# Social, Economic and Political Studies of the Middle East and Asia (S.E.P.S.M.E.A.)

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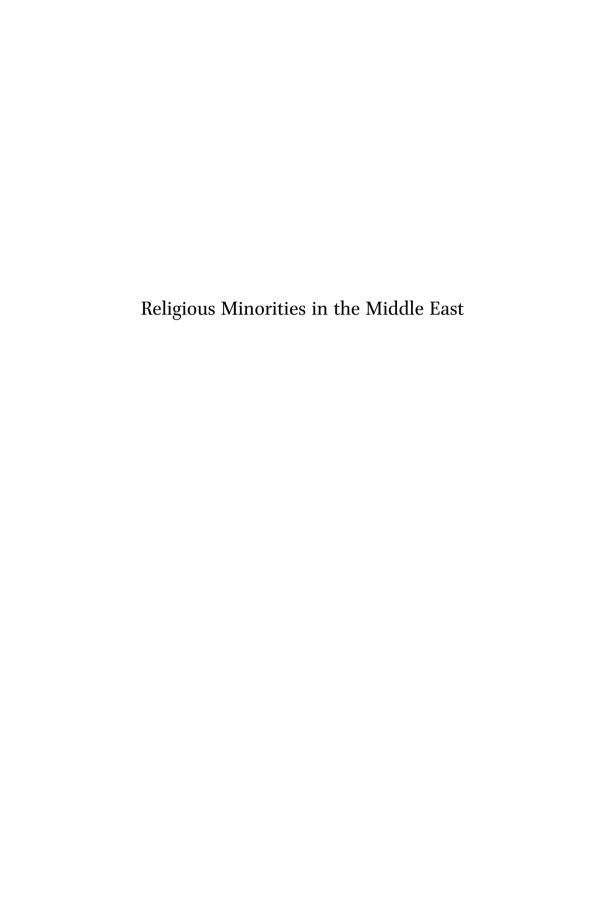
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*Cover illustrations:*
The Mohammed al Amin Mosque and the Greek Orthodox Saint George Cathedral, Beirut, Lebanon. Photographs: Hala Abou-Zaki.

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PART II: MUSLIM MINORITIES

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# PREFACE

This volume is the result of a workshop which was held twice, the first time in 2008 in Bergen (Norway) then a year later in Aix-en-Provence (France). The papers presented in Bergen were discussed by the participants among themselves. We then decided to meet again in Aix, this time with other Middle East scholars as discussants of our works.

We extend our thanks to the University of Bergen and the Christian Michelsen Institute for funding and organizing the workshop in Norway. Alongside the Research Council of Norway both institutions have also given generous support for the publication of this volume. We also wish to thank the Institut de recherches et d'études sur le monde arabe et musulman (IREMAM). The IREMAM generously funded and hosted our second meeting in Aix-en-Provence in 2009. We are grateful to the discussants in Aix, Bernard Botiveau, Hamit Bozarslan, Christian Bromberger, and Lucette Valensi, for their inspiring comments and expert insights. Our special thanks go to Hamit Bozarslan for the continued interest he showed for our project.

The problem of transliteration, well-known to authors writing on the Middle East in Western languages, is made more acute in the case of edited volumes which deal not only with the Arab world but also with Turkish and Persian-speaking societies. The editors have solved the problem by letting each author use his or her preferred transliteration style.

INTRODUCTION

## DOMINATION, SELF-EMPOWERMENT, ACCOMMODATION

Anh Nga Longva

*Religious Minorities as a Research Topic*

Until recently, religious minorities in the Middle East were not the object of much scholarly interest. With the exception of a few classic works by historians on Christians and Jews, mostly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the field was dominated by literature written by activists and Western missionaries, the bulk of which deals with one specific period, the last years of the Ottoman Empire, and one specific type of event, the massacres of Christians in Eastern Anatolia. Wider scholarly interest for religious minorities in the Middle East developed in the 1980s, triggered by the Iranian revolution and the rise of Islamism in the Muslim world. The 1990s saw a series of publications on the topic, but it was in the first decade of the twenty-first century that the religious minorities in the Middle East really moved to the foreground of academic research. This is in part related to the so-called war on terror, especially the military intervention by the US and its allies in religiously plural Iraq. This intervention and the ensuing change in the sectarian balance of power led to violent retaliations exerted, by proxy as it were, against the local religious minorities. Besides these topical events, the twentieth century has been described as the century of minorities, or more precisely, the century when concern with the need to provide a legal framework to protect minorities gained unprecedented attention. The United Nations, the key forum where minority issues were debated, has contributed importantly to fostering greater awareness and mobilization among the groups concerned. By the late twentieth century, minorities no longer accepted tolerance as an ideal value; instead they were demanding the right to recognition, and there are no signs that these demands will diminish. The combined interest in minority issues and political

Islam has resulted in an increase in the number of academic publications on religious minorities in the Middle East over the past ten years.

Why do we need yet another volume on this topic? This book differs from most works on religious minorities in several ways. First of all, although it is historically informed, this is not a historical work but a study of the religious minorities in the contemporary, post-colonial context. It aims at throwing light on the minorities' situation today. Even when the past is granted much scrutiny, as is the case with several chapters, this is done to underlie the fact that the relationship between majorities and minorities is part of a dynamic process in which both continuity and change must be taken into consideration. The analysis of the majority-minority relations and the minorities' responses to the challenges of domination is carried out in light of some of the major political and social events which have shaped the region up to the beginning of the twenty-first century. In order to grasp this complex, multi-faceted situation, we have drawn on the expertise of researchers from various disciplines. While we may be differently positioned in terms of theories, what most of us do have in common is that our knowledge is based on extensive and repeated field studies in the societies about which we write.[1]

Another distinctive feature of this volume lies in its dealing with both non-Muslim and Muslim minorities. Traditionally, Muslim minorities are not included in studies of religious minorities in the Middle East. The very concept of 'religious minorities' tends to be used only in reference to non-Muslims. We recognize here the century-old perspective of the successive Muslim States as well as the influence of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which formalized the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and deals with the issue of religious minorities' rights in the Republic of Turkey. Because the Treaty was signed between Turkey and major European states—the only non-European signatory was Japan—the minorities under consideration were exclusively Christian and Jewish. The exclusion of Muslims from the study of religious minorities in the Middle East since then has been a major weakness in this field of research. We are convinced that an integrated approach is more fruitful. To adopt a water-tight distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim minorities is to espouse uncritically the majorities' premises. Such an analytical perspective almost certainly

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[1] The possibility for doing field research on religious minorities in Iran being extremely limited, the authors on the Baha'is and the Zoroastrians, Margit Warburg and Michael Stausberg, have had to resort to other research methods.

overemphasizes the differences between the two types of minorities and blinds us to whatever commonalities may exist between the treatment to which they are subjected and their responses to this treatment. Dealing with both Muslim and non-Muslim minorities also opens up for comparative reflections. Even in the absence of explicit and systematic comparison, the mere fact of exploring case-studies from both groups within the same volume helps throw light on majority-minority relations, not as unique cases involving groups with unique doctrinal and cultural idiosyncrasies, but as universal interactional processes with comparable patterns of action and reaction. Relations between religious majorities and minorities are not only a matter of religion;[2] they are also shaped by factors external to religion, among them domestic and international politics, the economy, and class. This is not to say that the differences between Muslim and non-Muslim minorities are negligible, but these differences exist side by side with important non-religious, structural similarities. There are, therefore, strong arguments for treating the two groups of minorities together rather than for keeping them analytically apart.

Finally, this volume seeks to analyse the religious minorities from a dynamic perspective. The relationship between religious majorities and minorities in the Middle East is often construed in terms of a stark opposition between active domination and passive submission. Besides accepting uncritically, or overstating, the majorities' power, such a description places emphasis on the challenges faced by the minorities while overlooking their astonishing ability to mobilize internal and external resources to meet these challenges. Religious minorities are not passive victims living under the iron rule of an all-powerful majority, even though one easily gets this impression from the literature written by activist authors. Much of this literature tends to focus exclusively on times of acute conflicts, leaving aside long periods of relatively peaceful coexistence. In times of conflict, the minorities' margin of action is severely reduced, and their status as victims overshadows their status as social agents, active devisers and users of strategies of accommodation and self-empowerment. Yet this is an important part of their overall identity, and it must also be taken into consideration in the analysis. While it is imperative to highlight the victimization of all minorities in times of conflict, a true understanding of such conflicts requires an understanding of what goes on between minorities

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[2] Nor are religious differences in the Middle East, where all the faiths involved are variations on a monotheistic theme, particularly irreconcilable.

and majorities in times of relative peace as well. A literature that depicts minorities only as victims conveys the erroneous impression that they are systematically alienated from their societies. Field observation shows that this is not the case. Whether Muslim or non-Muslim, the minorities share many cultural values and practices with the majorities. They are as much part of the local societies as the majorities. Only by treating them as informed social agents can we do justice to the men and women gathered under the impersonal and insidiously disempowering rubric of 'religious minorities'. For these groups, the problem lies precisely in that rejection comes from home, that is, from people with whom, in most cases and for most of the time, they share a common cultural script—norms, languages, ways of life. Seeing members of religious minorities as whole persons and social agents and not only as victims allows us to better understand their dilemmas and appreciate the resourcefulness they display in facing these dilemmas. We believe that an epistemology that axiomatically defines minorities as powerless calls for critical reflections; at the very least its underlying assumptions need to be made explicit. The first step is to clarify the minority concept itself.

### The Concept of Minority

As seen above, in the Middle East, the phrase 'religious minorities' has long been used to refer only to non-Muslim populations. But even non-Muslims were not always known as minorities. The term 'minority' (Ar. ʿaqalliyya) was introduced to the Middle East in the last decades of the nineteenth century by the European Powers, who cited the protection of Ottoman Christians as justification for intervening in Ottoman domestic affairs. Applied to the non-Muslim population, ʿaqalliyya is a substitute for the older, more common term taʾifa ('sect') (Shami 2009).[3] ʿAqalliyya is a quantitative term which depicts the relative size of a group, while taʾifa, which besides sect also means group, class, people, and depicts the group's identity, in this case, its religious identity. Taʾifa can thus be used to speak of a majority as well as a minority. One could argue that this way of thinking about human groups, not in terms of relative size but in terms of identity, e.g. beliefs, practices, and other defining characteristics, is 'pre-modern': taʾifa refers to the supposedly primordial nature of the group, that which

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[3] From the nineteenth century onwards, the preferred term by the Ottomans was *milla/ millet*.

distinguishes it from other groups, whereas 'minority' does not ascribe to this group any specific, pre-ordained features. On the face of it, the use of the more neutral, quantitative term 'minority' implies the recognition of an essential human commonality beneath the religious differentiations. This makes 'minority' a decidedly modern concept, a product of the Enlightenment. In this sense, the secular term ʿaqalliyya is, in theory, a better way of describing groups than taʾifa. In practice, however, 'minority' comes burdened with its own essentializing connotations, despite its purportedly being merely the description of a group's relative size.

'Minority' is commonly understood as synonymous with inferiority, weakness, subordination. This semantic association is so strong that the term is often used in its extended, rather than its original, meaning. Thus, suppressed and disempowered numerical majorities are not uncommonly referred to as minorities, with or without the adjective 'sociological' (see below). This is why it is difficult to dissociate minority from powerlessness, even though there are plenty of instances of dominant and powerful minorities in the world, past and present. In popular usage but also in social theory, the defining characteristic of a minority is precisely its being the "object of collective discrimination" (Wirth 1945: 347). It has even been suggested that minority is merely "a sociological euphemism for oppressed groups" (Nibert in Wilkinson 2000). In this view, a powerful minority is an oxymoron: if it is powerful, it cannot be a minority, hence, the tendency to speak of powerful minorities not as minorities but as elites. A minority exists only in relation to a majority, which is assumed, also by definition, to be powerful. But as is well known, size does not always entail might. A minority can be more or less weak or more or less powerful, and so can a majority. Considering these fluctuating semantic practices and the ambivalence that characterizes 'minority' and 'majority', these terms must be used cautiously and critically. The correlation between minority and subjugation or powerlessness is a matter to be investigated, not a natural fact on which to build an analysis. The important thing to bear in mind is that relationships between majority and minority are not given and static but always processual. They are the temporary, evolving outcomes of ongoing interaction between groups under shifting political and material conditions.

*Religious and Ethnic Minorities*

In much of the literature on minorities in the Middle East religion is subsumed under ethnicity, and religious minorities are often studied as part of ethnic minorities (i.a. Esman and Rabinovich 1988, Bengio and Ben-Dor

1999). Ethnic groups are groups which define themselves and are defined by others in terms of ascriptive characteristics, perceived as 'primordial' or inherited. In fact, these characteristics range from: imperative traits, i.e. traits that people are born with, such as facial features, skin colour, hair type ('race'); to traits that are acquired, therefore can be modified, unlearnt or abandoned, such as language, customs, religion ('culture'); to accidental and/or arbitrarily imposed characteristics such as national and territorial affiliations. According to this definition of ethnicity, religious minorities are a sub-category of ethnic minorities. While some of these minorities may also differ from the majority linguistically or racially, such differences are not granted the same importance as is religion in the societies where they live.

In this book we choose to focus on religion as the primary difference marker. As elsewhere in the world, Middle Eastern societies have a vast range of criteria for social categorization. Of these, religion is arguably the most significant, in social, legal, and political terms. The Middle East is not only the birthplace of the great monotheistic religions, it is also the first place where monotheism was adopted as state religion. In 380 CE, the Byzantine emperor Theodosius I enacted a law establishing Catholic Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire. Since then religious diversity has been subject to state control and regulation, as evidenced by the relentless persecution of Christian sects declared heretic by the Byzantine State. Although much more tolerant, the Muslim States also held firm control over religious diversity. Detailed rules were devised for the incorporation, on specific conditions, of the Peoples of the Book, the only tolerated non-Muslims, into Muslim society. The basic rule of Islamic law was to uphold diversity on the basis of inequality. Today, the Constitutions of most Middle Eastern States explicitly define their religious nature. With very few exceptions, religion still provides the basis for the legislation on personal status and family relations. The absence of a universal code perpetuates the differentiation of the citizenry along religious lines, which was a characteristic feature of the Ottoman millet system. At the same time, the religious minorities' legal autonomy has become more limited in a number of countries, as a result of reforms during the twentieth century.

The depiction of a group as a 'religious' or an 'ethnic' minority is not a constant one throughout the region: a group that is classified as a religious minority in one society can be classified as an ethnic minority in another. Thus, Kurds are an ethnic minority everywhere because their language dif-

fers from Arabic in the Arab countries, from Turkish in Turkey, and from Persian in Iran. But while Kurds, who are overwhelmingly Sunni Muslims, are part of the religious majority in Turkey, Iraq or Syria, they are a religious minority in Iran. Conversely, the Shi'is are the religious majority in Iran but a religious minority, sometimes in the sociological sense, elsewhere. In the Muslim Middle East, only Armenians and Jews are at the same time religious and ethnic minorities. The porous line between 'ethnic' and 'religious' categories shows that cultural traits are not the critical feature in the classification of groups in society because such traits are situationally defined. Therefore, although religion is the primary distinguishing feature of the minorities in this study, the object of our analysis is not religion *per se* but the use to which it is put in the production and reproduction of similarities and differences among and between groups. In other words, we are interested in the rationale and strategies of inclusion and exclusion or, to borrow from Fredrik Barth, in the "structuring of interaction which allows the persistence of cultural differences" (1994: 16) rather than in the differences themselves.

### Minorities: Numerical and Sociological

Most Muslim and all non-Muslim minorities in the Middle East are numerical minorities. There has occurred a radical shift in this regard since the days of the Prophet Mohammed. At his death, large areas of the region which is now known as the Middle East were predominantly Christian. Muslims were a numerical minority until the tenth, probably even the eleventh century CE (Courbage and Fargue 1992). Today, the region is overwhelmingly Muslim. The number of Christians is rapidly decreasing, due to emigration and low birth rate. Only Egypt, Syria and Lebanon still have a substantial, but nevertheless decreasing, Christian presence. As for Jews, with the exception of Iran and Yemen which still have tiny Jewish communities, practically all have left, principally to Israel. Numbers are important as, below a certain threshold, it is difficult for a minority, whether ethnic or religious, to have a well- organized social life as a distinct group and to ensure its own social reproduction. Besides, the smaller and more dispersed a group is, the easier it is for the majority to overlook its demands and interests, even violate its rights. On the other hand, large numbers are not always a guarantee of empowerment, as is illustrated by the case of the Shi'is in Bahrain.

Are the religious minorities in the Middle East sociological as well as numerical minorities? By sociological minorities are meant groups that are systematically discriminated against and dominated, irrespective of their number. If we take our cue from the events reported in the media, the answer to the above question is clearly yes, but we must bear in mind that the Middle East is a diverse region and the minorities' situation is best described in terms of a continuum. Among the case-studies presented in this volume, some minorities are the object of serious and enduring discrimination, such as the Baha'is in Iran. For others, the situation is more fluctuating and ambivalent. Claims of discrimination have been frequently reported and documented by all minorities, and they must be taken seriously. As students of ethnic and religious relations, meanwhile, we know that perceptions of discrimination are not only based on the individual's or the group's actual experience of ongoing interaction. They also derive from the group's collective memory of minority-majority relations over time, and from the enduring impact of power asymmetry on groups' self-perception. Nonetheless, discrimination is not merely a matter of perceptions; it is also a social practice that can be observed and recorded. The most important signal of discrimination is denial of the rights enjoyed by the rest of the society.

*Minorities and Rights*

Experts in international law distinguish between two major categories of rights: civil and political rights, and social and economic rights. Civil and political rights are commonly known as 'first generation rights', as they were historically the first to be recognized and codified. Among these rights are the guarantee of integrity of person and property, freedom from arbitrary arrest, the right to due process and fair trial, and the right to seek redress. Social and economic rights are more recent, hence 'second generation rights', yet denial of these rights—e.g. the right to found a family, to own property and to work, and access to education and health assistance—is the most effective weapon of domination and disempowerment. Most of the minorities in this volume have experienced or are experiencing denial of some rights, both first and second generations, either as a result of direct discrimination or because of a general absence of justice, law and order in their society; being often the weakest members, they also tend to be the prime victims.

All human rights, both 'first generation' (civil and political) and 'second generation' (social and economic), are *individual* rights. In the 1990s, the

United Nations, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and the Council of Europe promulgated minority rights instruments. As defined in these documents, minorities' rights are also individual, insofar as they are given to persons belonging to minorities and not to the minority group itself (Gilbert 2005).[4] But to consider the minority group simply as the context for the exercise of the individual members' rights is highly unsatisfactory. A vast debate is ongoing as to who should be the minority rights-holder, the individual or the group. This in turn leads to asking what the relationship between the individual member's rights and the rights, if any, of the minority group should be, and what is the role of the state *vis a vis* both individual members of the group and the group itself (ibid.: 140). The present volume does not deal with this legal debate, which takes particularly place in forums concerned with matters of ethnic indigeneity. But since the concept of 'nativism' (indigeneity) is raised in one chapter (chapter 9), and since this topic is of potential relevance to several religious minorities in the Middle East, a brief mention of the status of native or indigenous people is called for. The term 'indigenous people' is widely used to refer to a variety of *ethnic* minorities the world over, but so far it has not been applied to *religious* minorities, even though this category is regularly included in most minority rights documents. In the Middle East, some of the Christian autochthonous inhabitants, whose presence in the region dates back to the pre-Islamic era, have claimed the indigenous status. Copts in Egypt and, more recently, Chaldo-Assyrians in Iraq (through their diasporic representatives in the USA) are two examples. Among the Muslim minorities, the Baharna Shi'is of Bahrain have also claimed to be indigenous, not in relation to Islam but in relation to the ruling Sunni minority of the island kingdom (Louër 2006). The Shi'is in Saudi Arabia are making use of the same strategy (Louër, this volume).[5] Of crucial importance among

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[4] This is for instance, the view propounded in the UN Covenant on Civil and Political rights. Article 27 defines cultural rights as follows: "In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, *persons* belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language" (emphasis added).

[5] All these groups satisfy the requirement of long-term presence which is a crucial component in the definition of an indigenous people by international organizations. The 1989 Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, Art. 1 (b) gives the following definition of indigenous peoples: "Peoples in independent countries who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonisation or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions". That the status of indigenous people is not applied to the religious minorities in the Middle East is possibly due to the

the minority rights is the right to self-determination. Because the notion of self-determination often raises the spectre of secession, even the UN, in whose Charter this principle is embodied, has so far been reluctant to recognize any further extension of this right beyond the traditional context of decolonization. In the context of minorities, however, self-determination means the right to define themselves rather than being defined by the majority, to represent themselves rather than being represented, to write their own histories, and to see their children taught their own, and not the majority's, religion at school. Self-determination here is, in Alfredsson's words (2005: 164) "about keeping groups happy within States"; hence, it is ultimately about preventing or reducing the likelihood of state dismemberment (ibid.). The exercise of the above rights presupposes a certain type of social organization, and this is only possible with the consent of the state, which means that cultural rights belong to both the social and the political fields. Minority rights are those the power-holders are most prone to ignore and reject. For them, to acknowledge the presence of minorities within the nation-state is to jeopardize the national project. Therefore many states' policy towards minorities consists in either neglect or repression. A more positive solution is an attempt at integration. In the Middle East, nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s could be seen as one such attempt, as far as most, though not all, religious minorities are concerned.

### Religious Minorities in the Age of Nationalism

In the Arab world, Arab nationalism or pan-Arabism became the dominant ideology after the revolution in Egypt put an end to the monarchy and eventually brought Nasser to power. The 1950s and 1960s, the heyday of Arab nationalism, were decades of hope for many religious minorities in the Arab countries. Being a secular ideology, Arab nationalism downplayed the importance of religious affiliation while elevating ethnic (Arab) identity. The key criterion for citizenship in an Arab country was the bearers' Arabness, irrespective of their creed. Arab nationalism glorified

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understanding of the term 'indigenous' as implying a way of life "closely interwoven with land, including the links of traditional economies to the land, such as for fishing, gathering, herding and hunting" (Alfredsson 2005: 169). Besides, although religion is mentioned, in reality language and way of life are the key criteria in the definition. For example: in the country report *The Rights of Indigenous People: Egypt* by the International Labour Organization and African Commission on Human & Peoples' Rights 2009, the indigenous peoples discussed are the Bedouin nomads and the Nubians. There is no mention of Copts.

Arab culture and Arab history, and the fraternal bond between all Arabic-speaking people. As such it excluded all the non-ethnic Arabs: in Kuwait, for instance, Shiʿis were treated as second-class citizens and excluded from some jobs in the government sector in the 1960s and 1970s because many were of Persian origin (Fuller and Francke 1999). On the other hand, many Christian Arabs initiated or contributed to the creation of nationalist movements in Syria and Lebanon, among them Michel Aflaq, the Greek Orthodox founder of the Baʿth ideology. Not only Christians but also Shiʿis, Druzes, and Alawis pinned their hopes on the Arab nationalist project. Like Christians, these heterodox Muslims saw in Arab nationalism a longed-for opportunity to achieve integration once and for all in a nation in which the only entry ticket was Arab identity. In retrospect, some analysts are surprised that Arab nationalism, a European-inspired ideology, managed to hold centre stage for so long, given that when it appeared in the Middle East in the early twentieth century, the ground was already occupied by a much older, locally-bred ideology of state and identity: Islam. An answer to the puzzle is that, regardless of what the nationalist ideologues might have thought and claimed, at the grassroots level Arabness was undistinguishable from Islam. For many Arabs, being Arab and being Muslim are two sides of the same coin. Even among the nationalist ideologues, Islam was commonly viewed as "the crowning glory of [the Arabs'] history" (Zubaida 2004: 410), and the Arabic language as the most precious item of Arab culture, because it was the language of the Qurʾan. Yet there are undercurrents of tension between Arab nationalism and Islam. Arabness and Islam may be amalgamated categories at the popular level, but as an ideology, Arab nationalism counts secularism among its typical features.[6] This does not mean that Arab nationalists were necessarily hostile to religion, only that they wanted to avoid granting too much importance to an institution they knew to have a potentially divisive effect on national unity. Neither under Nasser in Egypt nor under the Baʿth in Iraq and Syria, was religion allowed a determining role in the public sphere. Religion in this context means first and foremost Islam, which explains the warm support Arab nationalism enjoyed among non-Muslim minorities.

In Turkey, post-World War I nation-building took place against a different, much more dramatic backdrop: military defeat and the dissolution

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[6]  Saʿd Zaghloul, the early Egyptian nationalist leader, has proclaimed that "religion is for God, and the fatherland is for all its members" (quoted in Zubaida 2004: 407).

of an empire, massacres and ethnic cleansing, vast population exchange, plus the desperate struggle to save Anatolia from the grasp of the victorious allies and their Greek protégés. When the Republic of Turkey emerged after war, it had very few non-Muslim minorities left in its territory, unlike in several Arab countries. But the common point between Turkish and Arab nationalisms was their decidedly secular character, and the Alevis, Turkey's largest Muslim minority, pinned all their hopes on Atatürk's unswerving secularism.

Iranian nationalism developed in the late nineteenth century. According to the nationalist narrative, decline started with the Arab invasion in the seventh century CE, and continued with the domination by Turks, Mongols, then again Turks, and finally by Russia and Great Britain. Iranian nationalists tend to hark back to the pre-Islamic past when Iranian civilization was said to flourish untainted by foreign influence. This untainted civilization had important Zoroastrian elements in it, making nationalism a port of access to the Iranian polity for this minority. The 1979 Islamic revolution was a turning point: from seeing itself as a secular nation-state Iran now sees itself as the heartland and the champion of Shi'ism. Consequently, lines were drawn between different kinds of citizens, those who, because of their religion, truly belong and those who belong only conditionally. Something similar to this situation also took place in other countries in the region with the rise of Islamism from the 1980s onwards.

### *Religious Minorities and Islamism*

By the late 1960s it was clear that nationalism had failed to achieve its lofty promise of creating modern, prosperous, and just societies. While mass education had improved, economic development had come to a halt, unemployment was rampant, the gap between rich and poor had widened; political authoritarianism thrived. The Arab defeat in the Six-Day War against Israel in 1967 signalled the end of the age of nationalism, especially in the Arab world. Islamism stepped into the ideological void left by the demise of nationalism. The 1979 Iranian revolution was the key event that inaugurated the official rise of Islamism in the Middle East. It is commonly claimed that a significant and radical shift in the ideological landscape of the Middle East has taken place since 1979: from secular, left-leaning nationalism to conservative Islamism. This claim has been questioned by a number of central scholars, among them Sami Zubaida (2004), who argues that while there undoubtedly are contradictions between nationalism and

Islamism, there are also important continuities. According to Zubaida, "[f]ew Islamists have followed the logic of Islamic community as against the nation, and few nationalists have not accorded religion a place of honour in the attributes of the nation" (op. cit.: 408). This contention by Zubaida is all the more convincing when we keep in mind that nationalism in the Middle East, especially the Arab and Iranian versions, was inspired not by the French Enlightenment model, with its focus on universal civic ties, but on the German Romantic model, with its focus on particularistic cultural ties. And while the most secular among the Arab nationalists have preferred to place emphasis on the Arabic language rather than on Islam as the core element of Arab culture, to most Arabs, religion is as important as, if not more than, language. Islam is part and parcel of their Arab culture.

Also in non Arabic-speaking Iran and Turkey, Islam is closely associated with the local culture, especially at the popular level and in daily life. In the Islamic Republic nationalism plays no less a role today than under the Pahlavis, but it is a nationalism whose defining historical events, myths, and landscapes are not ethnic but derive from Shi'ism. The real distinction we should make, therefore, is not between nationalism and Islamism but between secular nationalism and religious nationalism. Historically, therefore, the transition from nationalism to Islamism may not be the dramatic shift it is commonly said to be. Nevertheless, for the religious minorities in the region, the transition is often experienced in terms of the contradictions rather than the continuities between the two ideologies.

After secular nationalism had led them to believe that integration was possible, departure from secular politics, combined with calls for the integral implementation of the shari'a, has had a disheartening effect on the religious minorities, especially the non-Muslims. Islamism, even when espoused by the state in an unofficial or semi-official way, entails a change in the social climate, as its goal is to carry out not only political but also social reforms, which are bound to affect people's everyday life. The religious minorities watch these developments with considerable concern, uncertain about what their place in an Islamist or Islamist-leaning state would be. When national belonging is predicated on membership in a specific religious community, all those who are not part of this community are likely to be looked upon if not as outsiders, at least as 'conditional' members, i.e. tolerated citizens who are constantly expected to give proofs of their loyalty.

Generally speaking, the religious minorities respond to Islamism in two ways. First, there is mimesis, a process whereby the minority replicates the

strategies of the majority, both sides participating in the hardening of the identity boundaries between them (Picard, this volume). To the growing fundamentalism of the majority society there is a corresponding tendency toward communitarian withdrawal among the minority. A pattern of mutually exclusionary practices develops which, if left unchecked, can lead to conflicts and even physical violence.

The second reaction is voluntary emigration. Admittedly, these days migration is a solution considered by many in the region, majorities as well as minorities. Unemployment, authoritarianism, the escalating Arab-Israeli conflict, religious fundamentalism, the war in Iraq, all these problems combine to form powerful push-factors for the large population of youths who came of age in the first decade of the twenty-first century, only to find that there are few prospects of jobs and even fewer prospects of fair wealth distribution. But while almost everyone in the Middle East toys with the idea of leaving, Muslim migrants in general leave temporarily, often to work in the Gulf countries. Non-Muslims, for their part, aim at permanent emigration to Europe, the Americas, and Australia. Muslim minorities tend to follow the trend, but there are signs that, at least in the West, the chances for Christians to obtain visas and residence permits are better than for their Muslim counterparts.

### *Loyalty and the Scapegoat Syndrome*

Borrowing from Hirschman (1970), several authors in this volume describe emigration as 'exit', the alternative strategy to 'voice' and 'loyalty'. Voice being a difficult choice for numerically weak minorities living under authoritarian rule, there remains loyalty. Loyalty is a complex, multi-layered concept. Analytically it consists of at least two components, the cultural and the political. Political loyalty, or patriotism, is the explicit allegiance to society as a political unit, and to its institutions. Cultural loyalty arises from the individuals' attachment to their land, their society, and their particular way of life. Through cultural loyalty they make claims to legitimate belonging to a physical and social world. As stated earlier, several of the religious minorities in the Middle East today are autochthonous populations in their regions, often with considerable time depth. Their cultural loyalty is undeniable, and they will go to great lengths to accommodate themselves to the prevailing circumstances rather than severing their ties through exit. Loyalty and accommodation are strategies that go hand in

hand, and are most actively resorted to by minority members for whom exit is not a realistic alternative.

What is usually questioned by majorities is the minorities' political loyalty. Minorities everywhere are frequently suspected of disloyalty and targeted for lack of it in times of crisis. The more difficult the socio-economic conditions are, the greater the tendency for majorities to accuse minorities of disloyalty, and the more virulent the accusations. In the past, this was particularly the case with Christians. In the nineteenth century, many Christians threw their lot behind the European Powers and supported, sometimes directly, the latter's efforts to undermine the Ottoman State. Christians have been persistently suspected of having strong allegiance to outsiders and lacking in patriotism. Nowadays, also Muslim minorities suffer from a similar fate. With the rise of Iran as a powerful player in regional politics, Shi'is in the Arab world (Iraq, Lebanon, the Gulf States) are often accused of being Iran's fifth column.

Lately, another factor has contributed to heightening suspicions of minorities' disloyalty: the creation, through emigration, of large religious minority diasporas abroad, especially in Europe and the US. These communities have close and sustained connections with their kin and co-religionists back home. As they gain in education and prosperity, the diasporas take upon themselves several roles, as their kin's spokespersons and economic providers, and as watch-dogs of their rights.

With the world economic crisis and the Middle Eastern states embracing privatization, and with unemployment reaching alarming proportions, more and more families in the region have become dependent on the remittances sent home by their relatives abroad. But where the emigrants play the most critical role in the long run is in their initiating and financing communal projects such as the repair and construction of places of worship, the funding of private schools and hospitals, the distribution of scholarships, and other collective initiatives. In helping the minority communities achieve a higher level of welfare and education, and facilitating the practice of their religion, the diasporas seek to improve the minorities' self-awareness and the image they project in the society at large. In several cases, the diasporas are becoming larger than the parent communities at home. This is particularly striking in the case of the Baha'is, but it is also true for the Christians: there are today more Eastern Christians in the Western world than in Beirut, Jerusalem or Bethlehem (Maïla 2010). With the growth of the diasporas, a third actor has appeared on the stage occupied so far by the minorities and their majority states. In most cases, this third actor is good at winning the backing of the international community through the

United Nations and the major human rights organizations. The diasporas
also carry out intense lobbying among US and other Western politicians.

This new situation is not without its own problems: while international
attention undoubtedly prompts the Middle Eastern state authorities to be
more cautious in the way they treat their minorities, it also contributes
to enhancing the latter's visibility and otherness, and this, it is feared by
the local minorities, can exacerbate the majority population's resentment
and hostility. In the past, Western intervention, purportedly in favour of
religious minorities but mostly for political reasons, contributed to the
demise of the Ottoman Empire. Some local Christian minorities paid a
high price for it. The tragic consequences this event has had for millions
of people are a dark chapter in the history of the Middle East, one that still
touches a collective raw nerve in the region. Not surprisingly, any external
intervention in favour of religious minorities today, against the backdrop
of US-led military operations and talks of clash of civilizations, would be
interpreted in light of the bitter experience of the past. The minorities are
all too aware that support mustered by the diasporas among their new
Western countrymen is a double-edged sword which must be used with
greatest caution.

Diasporas, however, are only one part of the minorities' transnational
networks, the other part being their foreign co-religionists. Membership in
a world religion automatically entails membership in a vast global network,
and religion has always been, with trade and labour, a major force behind
international exchange. Furthermore, thanks to technological develop-
ments, religious minorities are today more than ever in touch with the
world beyond their national and territorial borders. In the nineteenth and
early twentieth centuries, Christian and Jewish minorities drew extensively
on the support of their co-religionists in the West. Today this support takes
place not in the form of overt political, let alone military, intervention but
in the form of intervention by Western non-governmental organizations.
One could say that these NGOs have taken over the role that Christian mis-
sionaries used to play in earlier days. They are the most vocal and arguably
the most powerful actors in the field of minority politics nowadays. Muslim
minorities too are globally oriented. Thus the Shi'is in the Middle East and
beyond have always kept in close touch with each other through their reli-
gious centres of learning and pilgrimage, primarily the holy cities of Najaf
and Karbala in Iraq and Shiraz and Qom in Iran. Events in these centres are
followed closely and are sources of inspiration for all the participants in the
Shi'i world, as the rise of the Islamic Republic has clearly shown. Not only the

relations between the minorities and their national majorities, but also the constant flow of interaction within the transnational networks consisting of diasporas and foreign co-religionists, play a key role in the shaping of the minorities' collective strategies at home.

*Muslim and Non-Muslim Minorities*

This volume is divided in two parts.

*Part I* deals with non-Muslim religious minorities, the so-called *dhimmis* (Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians). Historically, the dhimmis enjoy an officially recognized legal status, and they have always occupied a well-defined social niche within Muslim society. Their rights and obligations are spelled out in the religious and legal texts, and, since Ottoman times, their inclusion in the Empire took place within a framework known as the millet system. As Maurits van den Boogert shows in chapter 1, this system, as reformed after the Tanzimat, still provides a formal model of social and legal organization in many post-colonial states in the Middle East. But it is a model with some significant modifications: the logic of modern statehood, with its emphasis on the citizens' equality before the law, does not allow the existence of multiple 'special laws' and 'special practices', one for each religious community. As a result, non-Muslim minorities in the sucessor states have lost many of the cultural rights they had taken for granted under the Ottomans. Van den Boogert's chapter on the evolution of the millet system is important for the understanding of the non-Muslims' situation in Middle Eastern states today.

The remaining chapters on this group of minorities show that this situation can best be described as variations against an admittedly loose common backdrop. Not only are there differences between state policies, but the minorities themselves are far from being homogeneous groups. They differ in the way they understand and interpret not only their histories but also fundamental aspects of their status as religious minorities. One of these aspects is the state of being protected. In the Middle East 'protection' is as strongly connoted to the concept of non-Muslim religious minority as 'powerlessness' is to the concept of minority in general. Noting the common habit among Lebanese politicians to seek the support of powerful external allies in their internal disputes, Anh Nga Longva (chapter 2) explores the meaning of 'protection' through the eyes of two Christian communities, the Maronites and the Greek Orthodox. As 'protection' historically differs according to whether it emanated from the Muslim majority (through the *dhimma*) or from the European Powers in the nineteenth century (through

the capitulations), the two communities' experience of protection and their
memories of it are quite distinct. This has had a strong impact on the way
most Maronites and Greek Orthodox today perceive themselves and their
places in Lebanese society. In chapter 3, Grégoire Delhaye describes the
remarkable revival of the Coptic Church and community since the early
twentieth century; parallel to this are the events that led to the birth and
growth of the Muslim Brotherhood. While these parallel 'revivals' have
their own internal reasons, and are not part of a mimetic process with
each side reacting to the other, the result has been a growing alienation
between Muslims and Copts. Delhaye is sceptical to the oft-heard claim
about a '(re)islamization' of Egyptian society of which Copts are the
powerless victims. He predicts that the 2011 uprising, which successfully
toppled the Mubarak regime, is not likely to heal the rift between Copts
and Muslims in any significant way. Today Copts are less than ever willing
to play the role of a docile minority, all the more so as they benefit from
the activism of a vocal diaspora in the US and its allies, some of whom
are openly anti-Arab and anti-Muslim. It is precisely this type of support
the Christian Palestinians in the West Bank, studied by Bård Kårtveit in
chapter 4, seek to avoid. Kårtveit argues that the Christians of Bethlehem,
a minority with a high educational level, a global social network, and who
are well represented in public offices, are nevertheless structurally weak.
This weakness is highlighted by the growing problem of land disputes which
is interpreted by some Christians in sectarian terms. Absence of the rule
of law under the Palestinian Authority leaves all Palestinians dependent
on family and community networks for security and protection. Due to
their dwindling numbers, Christian Palestinians find themselves in what
the author describes as a 'protection gap'. Yet the West Bank Christians
are reluctant to seek the support of their Western co-religionists fearing
that such an intervention might harm their position within the Palestin-
ian community and the Palestinian national project in general. That state
policies play a critical role in shaping interactions between the various
religious components of the society is brought to light by Annika Rabo in
chapter 5. Rabo gives an analysis of the situation of religious and ethnic
relations in the last bastion of pan-Arab secularism, the Republic of Syria.
Contrary to Lebanon, ethnic and religious differences in Syria are typically
under-communicated in the official discourse. Much has been written about
the monopoly of power held by the Al-Assad family over Syria, and their
membership in the Alawi minority, yet the largest group in the country are
the Sunni Muslims. Building her analysis around the concept of convivial-
ity, the author explores the forms and contents of social relations among
the various ethnic and religious groups in Aleppo, and the impact of Sunni

public dominance on the city's particular brand of conviviality. The states studied so far can be described as secular or moderately religious. Sudan, the case-study in chapter 6 by Anne Sofie Roald, was, between 1993 and 2005, an Islamic single-party state. The long-standing social tensions in Sudan are commonly described in terms of religious opposition between the Muslim North and the Christian South, with the former seeking to restrict the latter's freedom of religion. Through an assessment of the 1998 and 2005 Constitutions in light of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Roald finds that total freedom of religion in Sudan is infringed upon for non-Muslims as well as for Muslims, because the right *not* to belong to a religion is flouted. However, she suggests, tensions between Northern and Southern Sudan should be viewed as the result of a combination of ethnic differences and unequal socio-economic development rather than being viewed exclusively in terms of religious conflicts. Of particular interest is the author's highlighting of the role played by Western NGOs, many of them working in close cooperation with local Christian groups. In Chapter 7 Michael Stausberg traces change in the position of the Zoroastrians in Iranian society throughout history. They have gone from being the dominant and culturally influential religion in pre-Islamic times to being a tiny, subordinate religious minority. From 1854, the fate of the Zoroastrians began to change and in the twentieth century they even enjoyed some decades of relative peace and prosperity. Ironically, but not unexceptionally, the only regime which has shown willingness to give Zoroastrians full civic recognition in the modern era was the secular authoriatarian regime of the Pahlavis. Under the Islamic Republic, Zoroastrians, Armenians, and Jews have the status of officially recognized minorities; but although they are allowed one seat in parliament, they are denied full political and cultural rights. The fate of another large non-Muslim minority in Iran, the Baha'is, is discussed by Margit Warburg in chapter 8. Although originally an off-shoot of Shi'ism, Babism developed away from Islam, and its followers, the Baha'is, do not perceive themselves, nor are they perceived by others, as Muslims. Because the Baha'i doctrine rejects the belief that the Prophet Mohammed was the seal of prophets, its followers are considered by the Muslim religious authorities as apostates: hence their relentless discrimination throughout the movement's history and their systematic persecution today in the Islamic Republic. The Baha'is' predicament is heightened by their historic opposition to the ulama. Earlier, they were to a certain extent protected against the wrath of the latter by the secular monarchical State. With the Islamic revolution, however, the state and the ulamas have merged into one totalitarian regime, leaving the Baha'is devoid of protection.

*Part II* deals with Muslim minorities. Whereas non-Muslims have a col-
lective denomination—*dhimmis*—and their status is based on a series of
practices accumulated through time and known as the *dhimma*, there is
no official collective denomination for Muslim minorities. In the English
language literature, they are sometimes referred to as 'heterodox Muslims'.[7]
While non-Muslim minorities could be said to suffer from 'overexposure',[8]
the problem for Muslim minorities is one of invisibility and silence. The
Constitution of most Arab States cites Islam as the official religion and the
primary source of law, but there is never any mention of sectarian affilia-
tion (Fuller and Francke 1999). Officially, Muslim minorities do not exist.
Lack of official recognition is not always a problem, however; sometimes, it
also has its advantages. Their 'invisibility' allows Muslim minorities, when
necessary, to make efficient use of accommodation strategies. In chapter 9
Laurence Louër analyses the remarkable change in the identity politics
of the Shi'is in Saudi Arabia over the past six to seven decades. Until the
1950s, they were content with underplaying their religious practices in
exchange for being left in peace by the Wahhabi zealots. Between the
1950s and 1970s, their activism was articulated in a nationalist and leftist
discourse perfectly in tune with the political mood of the time. In the
1970s, encouraged by the support by the Da'wa movement in Iraq and
Khomeini's revolution in Iran, the Saudi Shi'is adopted a less accommodat-
ing attitude towards the Saudi State. Inspired by recent international and
regional events, they have now moved from confrontation to a redefini-
tion of their collective identity, making use of discourses that resonate
both with the Saudi power holders (national patriotism) and with the
international community (minority rights). The same political flexibility
and ability for accommodation are brought to light in Kais Firro's study of
Shi'is, Alawis and Druzes in Lebanon and Syria (chapter 10). Through the
reading of works by central intellectual figures of the three communities,
the author gives a close view of the arguments that were used to support
the ideological choices made. Central to the analysis is the distinction
Firro draws between the practice of *taqiyya* (religious prudence) and
what he refers to as 'polytactic potential', widely, and rather successfully,

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[7]  Sunnis sometimes use the term *ghulāt* when speaking of Shi'is. *Ghulāt* is the adjectival
form of *ghuluww*, Arabic for exaggeration. The Shi'is are said to exaggerate their veneration
of members of the Prophet's family.
[8]  Prior to the Tanzimat reforms in the nineteenth century, non-Muslims had to follow
an imposed dress-code and wear only certain colours in order to be easily distinguished
from Muslims.

used by Shi'is in Lebanon since the early twentieth century. Firro is, less sanguine about their ability to accommodate to the more extreme form of 'Sunni Islamist-fundamentalism', which is spreading through several parts of the Middle East today. In chapter 11, Catherine Le Thomas gives us an in-depth look into what is undoubtedly the most common strategy of minority self-empowerment the world over: education. After a brief review of the growth of modern education in Lebanon, the favourite site of European missionaries' activities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the author concentrates on the process of educational development in the Shi'i community in the post-civil war period. She shows that the evolution of the Shi'is from an economically and politically marginalized community in Lebanon to their present situation, as the largest, most dynamic, and best politically organized community, is taking place in tandem with the creation of a vast network of schools. Le Thomas sees a striking parallel between this development and the self-empowerment of the Maronites in the nineteenth century. Chapter 12, by Ali Çarkoğlu and Nazlı Çağın Bilgili, deals with the Alevis, arguably the most invisible of all the Muslim minorities in the region. While the invisibility of Muslim minorities in the Arab States studied so far arises primarily from the reluctance to admit divisions within Islam, the invisibility of the Alevis in Turkey results from both this reluctance and the deeply secular nature of the Turkish State. For Alevis, state secularism is their only hope for security and integration, hence their staunch support not only for nationalism in general but also for Atatürk's particular brand of republicanism. Following the worldwide demise of secular, leftist ideologies, the growing Islamization of Turkish politics and society, and not least, their own migration to the cities, more and more Alevis today are preoccupied with identity politics, while trying to reposition themselves in an increasingly religious political landscape. Nationalism, whether Arab, Turkish or Iranian, was characteristically secular in the first part of the twentieth century. With the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, another form of nationalism arose. Eliz Sanasarian (chapter 13) describes it as religious, or more precisely 'Twelver Shi'i' nationalism as opposed to earlier 'Persian' nationalism, with its secular overtones and many Zoroastrian elements, under the monarchist regime. Iran's religious minorities are both Muslim and non-Muslim, some of whom are recognized, others not. Sanasarian's overview over the conditions under which these various groups live in Iran today raises interesting questions about the differences between the Islamic Republic and the Sunni States in the region regarding the treatment of religious minorities.

In the concluding chapter, Elizabeth Picard argues that the minority problem in the post-colonial Middle Eastern States has two dimensions, a structural and a cultural, and that both need to be addressed simultaneously. Central to the analysis is the state, not least its modern avatar, the nation-state. The governments that emerged upon its importation and adaptation to the region in the early twentieth century had the choice between two constitutional alternatives: demographic majority ('Tocquevillian democracy') or consensus democracy. Most states opted for the former, and thereby all claims to identity differences were dismissed and banned. Recently, however, a significant shift has taken place: following the dismal failure of national development policies, states are increasingly investing in the previously neglectged cultural and religious sectors, and we are now witnessing the competing constructions of we-groups by both the majority (i.e. the state), and the minority groups. The author looks into these processes from an analytical perspective which, while attentive to the historical specificity of the region, also seeks to override the exceptionalism thesis which has been too often used in the study of this region.

For several decades Middle Eastern societies have lived under the rule of entrenched authoritarian regimes. Among the justifications these regimes have given for the suppression of political freedom is the danger of sectarian conflicts. While justifications of dictatorship are always dubious, to say the least, clashes in which minorities are the designated victims have been frequent enough to lend a measure of credibility to this claim. The uprisings which are ongoing across the Middle East and North Africa since the beginning of 2011 and which, in some cases, have succeeded in bringing down the old regimes, is being heralded as the beginning of a new era. Whether this prediction will be fulfilled or not depends, among other things, on whether the states and majority societies in the region are ready to treat the people on the periphery, including followers of non-dominant faiths, not as minorities but as full-fledged citizens.

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PART I

NON-MUSLIM MINORITIES

CHAPTER ONE

MILLETS: PAST AND PRESENT

Maurits H. van den Boogert

The concept of 'millet' is central to the debate about the historical dynam-
ics between states and minority groups in Middle Eastern societies, and it
continues to be relevant for their legal status in several countries today.
'Millet' is generally associated with the Ottoman system for dealing with the
Empire's non-Muslim subjects, but modern historians have also used the
term to designate non-Muslim and even 'heterodox' Muslim communities
elsewhere, e.g. the Kizilbaş-Kurds in modern Turkey and the Assyrians in
Iran (Bumke 1980: 551–553; Nab7 1977: 237–249; Halliday 1992: 159–176). It
is often unclear, however, what the word exactly means outside the Otto-
man context: Does it refer to organized, state-recognized communities,
or not? And did these groups refer to themselves as millets? Did the state
use the term? In the field of Ottoman studies these questions have largely
been answered now, but, even there, scholars do not always use the term
'millet' unambiguously. The fact that the system remains relevant today,
but almost exclusively as a legal phenomenon, further complicates the
matter. This also applies to the debate about the status of non-Muslims in
the modern Middle East, where new terminology ('neo-millet') has been
introduced which may obscure rather than explain historical continuities.
For these reasons a solid understanding of millets in the Ottoman Empire
is required.

This chapter offers a survey of the debate about millets and their evolu-
tion in two parts, the first focusing on the period until the Age of Reforms,
the Tanẓimāt, and the second on the Decrees of 1839 and 1856 which
constitute their backbone. We end with an analysis of the remnants of the
millet system in the present day, with particular reference to Egypt.

*Historiography and Semantics*

In 1950 the first volume of Gibb and Bowen's influential *Islamic Society
and the West* was published in London and Oxford. Part two contained the
authors' views on the millet system. Despite their own acknowledgement

that their description was methodologically flawed, Gibb and Bowen's views on millets have acquired a near-canonical status. They presented the millet system as a rigorous hierarchy in which the Sultan assigned the management of non-Muslim communities to their ecclesiastical leaders, the Greek and Armenian Patriarchs and the Jewish Chief rabbi, who were granted legal jurisdiction and to whom the collection of communal taxes was delegated. According to Gibb and Bowen these divisions between the non-Muslim communities extended to their economic activities and were a reality in everyday life too (Gibb and Bowen 1950: 211–212).

The notion that the Ottomans implemented the millet system from the beginning of their rule was supported by Halil İnalcık. For example, in his article about the status of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch under Ottoman rule, İnalcık argued that the millet system had been part of the Ottomans' policies from the very beginning. After discussing the early period of Ottoman expansion, he states that "the second period for the so-called *millet* system began with the conquest of Istanbul in 1453", when the conqueror "made the capital (i.e. Istanbul) the seat of the heads of the three recognized non-Muslim communities, Orthodox Greek, Armenian and Jewish" (Inalcik 1991: 407–436).

İnalcık has even suggested that the millet system predated the rise of the Ottomans on the basis of the diploma issued in 1138 on behalf of the Abbāsid Caliph al-Muqtafī li-amr Allāh (r. 1136–1160) to the Nestorian Patriarch ʿAbdīshō III Bar Moqli (r. 1138–1148). The document recognized the Patriarch as the head of the *ṭawāʾif* (communities) of the Greeks (*al-Rūm*), the Jacobites (*al-Yaʿāqiba*), and the Melkites (*al-Malika*). According to İnalcık, the diploma then "enumerates the rights granted to him and to the members of his *milla*" (ibid. 200). This wording suggests that the word *milla* was already used in 1138 in the way the Ottomans employed it later. However, neither Alphonse Mingana's translation of the diploma, nor the facsimile of the original Arabic document he has published, contains the word *milla*, the diploma consistently speaking of *ṭawāʾif* (sg. *ṭāʾifa*) only (Mingana 1926: 127–133).

With his implicit[1] endorsement of Gibb and Bowen's portrayal of the millet system, İnalcık ignored a thought-provoking article by Benjamin Braude. Focusing on the Ottomans' own use of the word millet and related terminology like *ṭāʾifa* and *cemaʿat*, Braude concluded that "the millet system" is a twentieth-century historiographical construct, which should

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[1] There is no reference to Gibb and Bowen's work in İnalcık's article.

not be applied to the Ottoman period prior to the nineteenth century. According to Braude, it was only during the Tanẓimāt—from 1839 until sometime between 1871 and 1881—that the Ottoman government clearly had a policy for millets which could be called systematic. In the earlier periods, Braude argued, the situation of non-Muslim communities in the Ottoman Empire was variegated and diverse, a result of the plurality of the Ottomans' approach vis-à-vis their Christian and Jewish subjects. Braude also pointed out that the Jews in the Ottoman Empire lacked a pyramidal organization until 1835 (Braude 1982: 69–88).

Braude's article is arguably the most important contribution to the debate about the millet system. His conclusion that there was no coherent Ottoman policy to create empire-wide administrative and fiscal communities of Christians and Jews from the beginning of Ottoman rule is compelling. Braude's approach has two disadvantages, however. Firstly, his efforts seem to be directly and principally against the views of Gibb and Bowen, all elements of which Braude has attempted to counter.[2] This effectively limits the discussion about the millets to a historiographical debate of which Gibb and Bowen inadvertently established the parameters. Secondly, Braude's emphasis on the usage of certain terminology (the words millet, ṭāʾifa, etc.) has placed semantics at the heart of the discussion.

Many scholars have since accepted the gist of Braude's arguments, but few have engaged in the debate with him. A notable exception is Michael Ursinus, who distinguishes three meanings of the term *milla/millet*: 1) "religion, confession, rite"; 2) "religious community, community of the same confession or the same rite"; and 3) "[sovereign] nation, part of a people" (Ursinus 1993). The second section is particularly relevant for the debate about the millet system. Braude claimed that, prior to the nineteenth century reforms, in the Turkish sources the word millet mainly refers to "the community of Muslims" (Braude op. cit. 79). Disagreeing with this view, Ursinus refers to a number of (published)[3] documents issued by the Sublime Porte in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. For example, in a document dated 1159/1746 "the millet-i Ermeniyan is already designated as an empire wide religious community (*memālik-i marūsede sākin millet Ermeniyān*)". Ursinus also notes that, towards the end of the eighteenth century, the Ottoman fiscal administration already used the term *milel-i thelāthe*, "the three (non-Muslim) religious communities". Because this

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[2]  This is particularly clear in Benjamin Braude 2000.
[3]  Ahmet Refik [Altinay], *On altıncı ʿaṣırda İstanbul ḥayātı (1553–1591)* (Istanbul 1917).

reference concerns taxes on alcoholic beverages, this could only have
referred to the Orthodox, the Armenians, and the Jews (Ursinus 1993: 62).[4]
Ursinus concedes that the term 'millet' was not used systematically before
the nineteenth century, but his evidence contradicts Braude's boldest
claim "that there was no overall administrative system, structure, or set
of institutions for dealings with non-Muslims" (ibid. 64).

In 1993, two years after Ursinus' entry, an article by Hidemitsu Kuroki
about the Orthodox-Catholic community in Aleppo in the early nineteenth
century was published. On the basis of research in the *qāḍī* archives of
Aleppo, Kuroki supplied new evidence that the term 'millet' was already
used by the provincial and local authorities, as well as by non-Muslims
themselves, in first decade of the nineteenth century. For example, in a
conversation with the Ottoman governor of Aleppo, a Catholic Christian
stated that the Orthodox metropolitan he and his fellow Catholics had
been ordered to obey was "not our metropolitan nor do we belong to
his *millet*." (Kuroki 1993: 15). Furthermore, Kuroki reports that the *qāḍī*
of Aleppo issued an order in April 1818 in which he spoke of the *"millet-i
ermeniyān"* (the Armenian millet) and the *"mārūnī milleti"* (the Maronite
millet) (ibid. 18). Braude has argued that the meaning of ṭāʾifa and millet
were interchangeable prior to the 1820s, when on the local level virtually
only ṭāʾifa was used. On the basis of local sources Kuroki, however, suggests
that in some cases " 'ṭāʾifa' was a sub-category of 'millet' " (ibid. 12–15).[5]

Kuroki's findings push back the earliest attested usage of millet in the
provinces to the early 1800s. The provincial and local sources may well
contain earlier evidence, but this remains unclear, because many scholars
who have consulted them fail to provide the dates of each archival docu-
ment they refer to. This also affects our ability to answer the question
which should be more central to the millet debate: How were non-Muslim
communities in the Ottoman Empire actually organized?

Imperia in Imperio? *Self-Governance and the State Until the* Tanẓimāt

We should distinguish at least three domains in which autonomy, or at least
self-governance, was important for non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire,
and remains so for Christians and Jews in the Middle East today.

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[4]  The date is erroneously given as 1591/746. This should be 1159/1746.
[5]  Especially p. 13, where several concrete and dated examples are listed.

The first domain is that of religious theory and practice, i.e. anything from pure theology to liturgy, church services, and processions. Although the Muslim rulers did not interfere in purely theological or liturgical matters, the Islamic environment encroached on any other aspect that took place in public: the restoration of churches and chapels was restricted, as was their maximum height, because the non-Muslims' buildings should not tower over those of the Muslims. During the nineteenth century other buildings also became relevant, e.g. hospitals and schools. In the public space, Christians and Jews also had to take Muslim sensitivities into account, which had an effect on the number of religious symbols carried along in processions (for funerals, at Easter, etc.). The availability of (kosher and communion) wine, kosher meat, and specific kinds of bread (matza, but also communion wafer) partly depended on the non-Muslims' relations with the Muslim rulers, who had to allow either their production or importation. This was also was true for clothing, sumptuary laws forbidding Christians and Jews wearing green clothes, or white turbans. Even though these laws were seldom strictly upheld, it was unwise for non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire to disregard them altogether, and they must have been a constant reminder of the balance of power. At the same time, within these parameters Jews and Christians were free to wear their own traditional clothing, which, particularly in the case of the Jews, enabled them to foster their group identity.[6]

The second domain is that of administration and taxation. Throughout the Ottoman non-Muslim communities tended to have both an ecclesiastical and a lay leadership at the same time. The lay leaders, who were generally elected by the community, were responsible for administrative and financial matters. All arrangements with regard to taxes were thus made by the lay elites. The *jizya*, the poll-tax levied on all adult non-Muslim males, was the most symbolically charged example of such a communal levy. Although there was no uniform way of collecting it throughout the empire, the poll-tax was generally levied by the Ottoman state as a lump sum (*maqṭūʿ*) per community on the local level (Vatin and Veinstein 2010). This changed at the end of the seventeenth century, when payment of the tax was emphasized as an individual obligation. Even then, however, most communities continued to coordinate the collection of the tax among

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[6] Alexander Russell (1794) speaks of Jewish dress in Aleppo around 1750. According to the Russell brothers, all Jewish men had beards, and even the European Jews "are obliged by the Khakhan [i.e. chief rabbi] to comply with the custom". In general, they noted, the Jews lived very much "under the eye of their Khakans".

themselves. This enabled them to exempt some of their members (e.g. rabbis, and the poor) from payment altogether, while allowing others, who were formally exempt, voluntarily to make contributions nonetheless (ibid. 563; van den Boogert 2009). In the Balkans their role in the collection of communal taxes was an important factor in the rise of non-Muslim lay leaders (who had various titles, including *koca-bashıs, çorbacıs* and *knez* [*EI2:* 563; Karpat 1982])[7] as a "local aristocracy" in the eighteenth century, and the same was probably true for the Asian provinces, where lay elites among the Jews and Christians became more prominent during the same period (Masters 2001).[8]

The third "autonomous" domain concerned the non-Muslim communities' legal jurisdiction. Under certain conditions, the Jews and Christians were allowed to adjudicate legal disputes among members of their own community. We know more about this aspect of non-Muslim life in the Ottoman Empire from Jewish sources than from Christian accounts. In Jewish communities the rabbi also served as the head of the rabbinical court (Hebr. *av bet din*). Its jurisdiction included criminal cases, in the adjudication of which he was assisted by two other judges. Most of the larger Jewish communities had several of these courts, which tended to attract cases from smaller villages in the vicinity too. In addition, ad hoc courts were held in remote areas and at regional markets, on which occasions the head of the court was often a learned layman (Bornstein-Makovetsky 2010: 293). In general, however, this domain was dominated by the ecclesiastical leadership.

Although the laws of several Eastern churches have been studied well, we know much less about the actual Christian legal courts.[9] Their jurisdiction was probably limited to matters of personal statute, e.g. birth and death, and marriage and divorce, but it is not clear when proper courts were established among the Ottoman Christians, and this may well have differed from region to region. Bernard Heyberger has observed that, in

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[7] Karpat uses the unfortunate term 'primates' (from the Latin *primus*, but with biological connotations which are as inappropriate as they are inevitable) when referring to notables in the Balkans.

[8] Masters mentions the titles of *nasi* (secular leader) among the Jews (p. 62), and speaks of the "chief deputy of the four communities" (*tevaif-i erbaa baş vekili* or *dört milletler vekili*) among the Christians in the mid-eighteenth century (pp. 64, 65). In the Arab provinces, the title *wakīl* (lit. 'proxy') was generally used; see Bernard Heyberger, 1994.

[9] On the laws of the Maronites, for example, see Féghali 1962; Aouad 1933; Sfair 1933. For the (Catholic) Armenians, see Amaduni 1932, 1940 and Ghedighian 1941. Also see Wilmshurst 2000).

Greater Syria, Christian legal jurisdiction remained ill-defined until the beginning of the eighteenth-century (Heyberger 1994). During this period several Christian legal manuals were also published. The Maronite bishop of Beirut, ʿAbdallāh Qarāʿalī (1672–1742), for instance, composed two which were modeled on Muslim examples; around 1720 his *Mukhtaṣar al-sharīʿa* was published, and his *Pandectes, al-Fatāwā al-khayriyya* followed in 1733–1735 (ibid. 70–71). Until that time, the communities' legal jurisdiction appears to have been exercised on an ad hoc basis by their ecclesiastical leader, i.e. the bishops and patriarchs. They probably decided such suits on the basis of church laws, but in the absence of documentary evidence our understanding of Christian judicial practice remains limited. It is clear, however, that neither Christian nor Jewish leaders could prevent members of their communities taking their lawsuits to Islamic courts, although this was clearly discouraged (Gradeva 1997; al-Qattan 1999). The fact that non-Muslims indeed turned to the Muslim courts may partly be explained by the anticipation of a more favourable ruling under Islamic law (e.g. in the cases of divorce or divisions of estates),[10] but may also have been due to the limitations of the rabbis' and bishops' ability to enforce their decisions. For non-Muslims the question of whether to take a lawsuit to their "own" court or to that of the *qāḍī* was therefore not a foregone conclusion in favour of the former.

The notion that the Jewish and Christian communities under Ottoman rule constituted "empires with the Empire" (Sanjian 1965) is clearly an exaggeration. While the privileges of non-Muslims in each of these domains were based on solid legal precedents, in their practical implementation they sometimes had to be renegotiated, occasionally with the central Ottoman authorities themselves, but more often with provincial or local officials. It is with this process of local negotiations in mind that we now turn to an analysis of the Tanẓimāt, their effect on the status of non-Muslims in the nineteenth century, and their relevance for the situation in the modern Middle East.

### The Edicts of 1839 and 1856

France traditionally styled itself the protector of all Catholics in the Levant, but until the nineteenth century this had a greater symbolic than political

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[10]  For a case study of the division of a non-Muslim inheritance in accordance with Islamic law, see van den Boogert, 2005.

value. The "protection system" remained limited to individual members of non-Muslim communities, and even within that system the French did not only select Catholic protégés; in 1789, for example, some 14 percent of those under French protection were Jews (van den Boogert 2010). The nature of the protection system only changed gradually after the Treaty of Küçük Kainarca of 1774 ostensibly gave the Russians the right to intercede on behalf of all Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire. The Russians' ploy—their claim was based on a deliberately inaccurate French translation of the Turkish text (Davison 1976)—foreshadowed their activities in the Balkans and the Greek Islands, where they would later seek to extend their sphere of influence. In 1852 the Russian claim to be entitled to protect all Greek Orthodox subjects of the sultan would be one of the casus belli for the Crimean War.

Russia's policies also led other powers to become more assertive in their advocacy of sectarian causes. While France continued to support the Catholics, and particularly the Maronites, Great Britain eventually focused on the Jews. The decision to establish a British consular agent in Jerusalem in 1838 was a result of this process (Hyamson 1939).

Being 'different' from the Muslim majority, in the religious, legal, and social sense, had long been associated principally with the non-Muslims' status as *dhimmī*s, but from the late eighteenth century this changed for some—but not all—of them; their differentness now made them eligible for foreign protection, which significantly altered their relations with the Ottoman state. The advantages for the foreign powers and the non-Muslim communities involved were clear: the interests of the protected groups formed the pretext for Western political interventions, while foreign action on their behalf gave the Jews and Christians concerned leverage over state officials.

During the same period several non-Muslim communities were becoming more organized, either at their own initiative or at the state's behest. In the course of the eighteenth century Christian judicial procedures had increasingly been developed and refined—possibly, as Ursinus has suggested, in response to the rise of Catholicism and the concomitant religious strife (Ursinus 1993: 64)—and the lay leadership had strengthened its position. In the case of the Jews, the state intervened more directly by reinstituting the office of *Haham başı*, the Chief Rabbi in Istanbul, as the formal leader of all Ottoman Jews in January 1835, and recognizing the Jews as one of the one of the four "official" communities (*millet*s). The government thus imposed the millet structure on the Jews, undermining their privilege of self-governance in the administrative domain. This was almost five years before the *haṭṭ-ı hümāyūn* (imperial edict) of Gülhane was proclaimed in the Rose Chamber of the Sultan's Palace in Istanbul on 3 November 1839.

Sultan ʿAbdülmecīd I (r. 1839–1861) had ascended the throne earlier the same year in a particularly tumultuous period. Muḥammad ʿAlī in Egypt was increasingly posing a threat to Ottoman stability, and Russia made no secret of its ambitions to increase its influence on the Balkans. The Ottomans, who could no longer rely on the Janissary corps which had been abolished in 1826, needed support from France and Great Britain to turn the tide, and the Edict of Gülhane's emphasis on equal rights for Muslims and non-Muslims reflects this. As Hurewitz has pointed out, the edict "was essentially the handiwork of Reşīd Paşa, who sought by this means to wheedle concrete material assistance out of Britain." With an audience which included several Western representatives, Reşīd Pasha therefore proclaimed that

> The Muslims and the non-Muslim subjects of our lofty Sultanate shall, with-out exception, enjoy our imperial concessions. Therefore we grant perfect security to all the populations of our Empire in their lives, their honor, and their properties, according to the sacred law (Hurewitz 1975).[11]

The concept of legal equality of Muslims and non-Muslims was a radical departure from the precepts of Islamic law, on which the *dhimma* had been based.[12] In theory this also meant that 'discriminatory' taxes like the *jizya* were or would be abolished, but in practice the Gülhane Edict affected the status of Ottoman non-Muslims not nearly as profoundly as another decree issued more than a decade later.

The Reform Decree (*Iṣlāḥāt fermānı*) of 1856—which is often referred to in Western sources as a *haṭṭ-ı hümāyūn* too—was issued in the name of Sultan ʿAbdülmecīd on 18. February, but it had been prepared largely by the British and French ambassadors in Istanbul (Zürcher, *EI2*: 484–486). Again international circumstances undoubtedly influenced both the contents of the decree and its timing, just before the 1856 peace conference in Paris which would formally conclude the Crimean War. The decree, which does not have numbered articles, affected all three domains of non-Muslim 'autonomy' identified above. Starting with an explicit reaffirmation of its 1839 predecessor, the text states that

> All the privileges and spiritual immunities granted by my ancestors *ab antiquo*, and at subsequent dates, to all Christian communities or other non-Muslim persuasions established in my empire, under my protection, shall be con-firmed and maintained (Hurewitz 1975, 2: 150).

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[11] I have slightly modernized the translation by Halil İnalcık, substituting, for example, Muslims for Musselmen.

[12] The *dhimma* is discussed in more detail in the chapter by Longva in this volume.

The aim was to emphasize that the Porte was not adopting new measures, but merely codifying existing, legitimate policies. Nevertheless, the decree constituted a significant departure from established policies.

With regard to religious theory and practice—the first 'autonomous' domain—the 1856 decree stated that

> In the towns, small boroughs, and villages where the whole population is of the same religion, no obstacle shall be offered to the repair, according to their original plan, of buildings set apart for religious worship, for schools, for hospitals, and for cemeteries. The plans of these different buildings, in case of their new erection, must, after having been approved by the patriarchs or head of communities, be submitted to my Sublime Porte, which will approve of them by my imperial order, or make known its observations upon them within a certain time. Each sect, in localities where there are no other religious denominations, shall be free from every kind of restraint as regards the public exercise of its religion.

At first glance, these clauses seem an alleviation of the previous regime concerning the restoration of churches and other buildings with religious purposes, like schools. Previously, permission had to be obtained for each restoration, but the 1856 decree appears to abolish this rule, on the condition that "the whole population is of the same religion". The fact that this was not a blanket permission for the future construction of churches, however, is clear from the phrase "or make known its observations", an obvious euphemism for a denial of permission. Moreover, a more lenient interpretation of this element of the 1856 decree depends on the readings of the word 'religion' as referring to Christianity or Judaism in general. The last sentence of the second clause speaks of 'sects', which suggests that the presence of more than one sect in any location nullified the beneficial effects of the decree. What if more than one Christian community lived in a given location? Or if a single Christian community had become split into an Orthodox and a Catholic faction? Long before the Ottoman government formally accepted these divisions by establishing a Catholic millet (in 1831), Catholics had presented themselves as different communities, and in regions like Syria and Lebanon this may well have worked against them in the Ottoman authorities' interpretation of the 1856 decree.

The clause which follows immediately after the two quoted above adds that

> In the towns, small boroughs, and villages where different sects are mingled together, each community inhabiting a distinct quarter shall, by conforming to the abovementioned ordinances, have equal power to repair and improve its churches, its hospitals, its schools, and its cemeteries. When there is ques-

tion of their erection of new buildings, the necessary authority must be asked for, through the medium of the patriarchs and heads of communities, from my Sublime Porte, which will pronounce a sovereign decision according that authority, except in the case of administrative obstacles (ibid. 151).

Again, this seems favourable for Christians and Jews—but was it? Even in cities like Aleppo, where Judayda and Banqūsa were known as a Christian and a Jewish quarter, respectively, most (possibly all) parts of the town did remain mixed, i.e. there were always a few Muslims who resided in these areas too (Marcus 1989). Might their presence have constituted one of these undefined "administrative obstacles"?

The 1856 decree also had an impact on the Christians' and Jews' freedom to organize their communities as they saw fit. In 1835 a pyramidal structure had already been imposed on the Jews, but now all non-Muslims had to reform themselves:

> Every Christian or other non-Muslim community shall be bound within a fixed period, and with the concurrence of a commission composed ad hoc of members of its own body, to proceed, with my high approbation and under the inspection of my Sublime Porte, to examine into its actual immunities and privileges, and to discuss and submit to my Sublime Porte the reforms required by the progress of civilization and of the age. The powers conceded to the Christian patriarchs and bishops by the Sultan Mahomet II and by his successors shall be made to harmonize with the new position which my generous and beneficent intentions insure to these communities.

In response to the edict, several communities formulated reforms which they submitted to the Porte. In 1863, for example, the Ottoman government accepted the Armenians' proposal for a "constitution" (Niẓāmnāme-i Millet-i Ermeniyān) of their own in 1863.[13] Two years later, in March 1865, the Haham-hane Niẓāmnāmesi (General Regulations of the Rabbinate) were accepted as a blueprint for the reform of the Jewish community in the Ottoman Empire (Levy *EJIW*: 323–326; Erbahar *EJIW*: 326–327). Already by the 1856 decree, however, the Ottoman government introduced some new procedures for all millets, even if the wording appears to single out the Christians:

> The principle of nominating the patriarch for life, after the revision of the rule of election now in force, shall be exactly carried out, conformably to the tenor of their firmans of investiture.

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[13] The Armenians in the Ottoman Empire started to reform their communal administration in 1840s and submitted a first draft of the 'constitution' in 1857. For details, see Masayuki Ueno 2007.

Moreover, all clerics should henceforth take an oath, and receive a fixed salary:

> The patriarchs, metropolitans, archbishops, bishops, and rabbis shall take an oath, on their entrance into office, according to a form agreed upon in common by my Sublime Porte and the spiritual heads of the different religious communities. The ecclesiastical dues, of whatever sort or nature they be, shall be abolished and replaced by fixed revenues of the patriarchs and heads of communities, and by the allocations of allowances and salaries equitably proportioned to the importance, the rank, and the dignity of the different members of the clergy (Hurewitz 1975: 151).

The income of the clergy used to consist of ecclesiastical dues, which were levied internally in accordance with the community's own traditions, but now the Ottoman government forced them to accept fixed salaries. Not only did the Porte abolish the clergy's right to levy ecclesiastical dues as they were used to, it also forced the rabbis and priests to share the administration of their property—including, undoubtedly, pious endowments—with laymen from their communities:

> The property, real or personal, of the different Christian ecclesiastics shall remain intact; the temporal administration of the Christian or other non-Muslim communities shall, however, be placed under the safeguard of an assembly to be chosen from among the members, both ecclesiastics and laymen, of the said communities (ibid.).

While it is true that the decree of 1856 abolished the *jizya*, it introduced the tax payable in lieu of military service (first called *iʿāne-i ʿaskeriyye*, later *bedel-i ʿaskerī*) at the same time (Bowen, *EI2*: 855). The fact that the *jizya* was no longer levied, may well have been perceived as an important symbolic step towards full legal equality, but financially one tax had merely been replaced with another.

The impact of the Reform Decree on the administrative and fiscal domain of the non-Muslim communities was thus severe, particularly with regard to their organization. Nor did their legal autonomy remain unaffected, because the *ḥaṭṭ-ı hümāyūn* of 1856 stipulated that

> All commercial, correctional, and criminal suits between Muslims and Christians, or other non-Muslim subjects, or between Christians or other non-Muslims of different sects, shall be referred to mixed tribunals. The proceedings of these tribunals shall be public; the parties shall be confronted and shall produce their witnesses, whose testimony shall be received without distinction, upon an oath taken according to the religious law of each sect. Suits relating to civil affairs shall continue to be publicly tried, according to the laws and regulations, before the mixed provincial councils, in the presence of the governor and judge of the place (Hurewitz op. cit. 151).

These provisions did not constitute a major change. After all, commercial disputes were already brought before the *qāḍī* on a regular basis, unless both parties belonged to a single community and both agreed not to involve the Ottoman authorities. The fact that, in the mixed courts, non-Muslim judges also presided—publicly!—over commercial disputes may well have been perceived by Christians and Jews as advantageous. The same was true of the mixed provincial councils, which also included non-Muslim members. Such potentially positive aspects were not so easy to detect in the next clause, which held that

> Special civil proceedings, such as those relating to successions or others of that kind, between subjects of the same Christian or other non-Muslim faith, may, at the request of the parties, be sent before the councils of the patriarchs or of the communities (ibid. 151–152).

Until 1856 inheritance law had been one of the few domains in which the non-Muslim communities had truly been autonomous. In principle, inheritance law fell under the jurisdiction of the patriarchs and rabbis, unless (one of) the parties concerned chose to involve the Ottoman authorities. The decree of 1856 reversed the common procedure; now, matters of inheritance in principle fell under the state's jurisdiction, whether in the form of the *qāḍī* courts or the mixed tribunals is not specified, unless the parties concerned requested that their case be transferred to the jurisdiction of their patriarch or chief rabbi.

The *Iṣlāḥāt fermānı* of 1856 touched all three domains in which non-Muslim Ottomans had previously enjoyed some degree of autonomy: religious theory and practice, administration and taxes, and jurisdiction. The Porte intervened the most directly in the way the Christian and Jewish communities were organized, forcing new appointment procedures on them as well as introducing fixed salaries for the clergy.

### *Millets in the Modern Middle East*

In 2005 Paul S. Rowe coined the phrase 'neo-millet' to describe the dynamics between authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and their non-Muslims subjects today (Rowe 2007). What exactly is 'neo-' about the Egyptian system Rowe does not say. To be precise, in 1914 Egypt became a British protectorate and *de facto* independent from the Ottoman Empire. Independence did not make Egypt lawless; the new state merely had to pass new laws or confirm existing legal practices. With regard to the regulation of the status of non-Muslims the Egyptians chose to do the latter, declaring the

continuing validity of the Tanẓimāt decrees through Egyptian Law no. 8 of 1915 (ibid.). The millet system was thus not reinvented, or even modified, in modern Egypt; the existing system simply remained in place.

Although new laws and regulations have increasingly limited the applicability of non-Muslim law in Egypt, some remnants of the millet framework are still in place today. With regard to the basic legal status of individuals, for example, Berger explains that

> in contemporary Egypt, the Muslims, Christians and Jews are governed by the personal status law of their respective communities. This implies that the personal status of Egypt's legal subjects is based on their belonging to a religious community. In this respect, a person without religion is a legal non-entity (Berger 2001: 88).

This does not mean that the system has remained static for almost a century, despite Rowe's claim, that "the status of Christians under Egyptian law has never changed except in response to external stimuli" (Rowe 2007: 349). Rowe's apparent denial of Egyptian law's capacity to develop out of its own initiative suggests that he is ignorant of developments which affected the status of non-Muslims both in Ottoman civil law, and, more recently, in Egypt. For instance, towards the end of the Tanẓimāt, on 2 September 1881, the Porte issued a document called Sicill-i Nüfus Niẓāmesi (Regulation on Registration) which ordained that the performance of weddings among both Muslims and non-Muslims henceforth required the permission of the leaders of their religious communities, and that both these leaders and those concluding the marriage must inform the Population Office, a state institution, about it. In the same year all male heads of households were compelled by law to register all cases of death or divorce with the Population Office. Previously Christians and Jews had been welcome to register marriage contracts in Islamic courts and to make arrangements for the division of estates there. Originally estates in principle fell under the authority of the rabbis and patriarchs, but in 1856 the mixed courts were in principle assigned jurisdiction over such cases, except when the parties asked for them to be transferred to the church or rabbinical court. The 1881 obligation to register these cases with the Ottoman authorities strengthened the earlier trend towards state centralization, and further undermined the non-Muslims' autonomy (Ortaylı, 1990).

In modern Egypt the state has progressively limited the legal autonomy of its Christian and Jewish subjects, restricting the application of non-Muslim personal status laws to marriage and divorce, i.e. family law (*qānūn al-usra*) (Berger 2001). Non-Muslims had their own courts, known as Millī courts,

until 1955. In that year Law 462 on the Abolition of the Sharīʿa and Millī Courts was passed, article 6 of which states that

> With regard to disputes related to the personal status (*aḥwāl shakhṣiyya*) of non-Muslim Egyptian [couples] who share the same sect and rite (*al-muttaḥidī al-ṭāʾifa wa l-milla*), and who at the time of the promulgation of this law have [their own] organized sectarian judicial institutions, judgments will be passed in accordance with their law (*sharīʿati-him*), all within the limits of public policy (*al-niẓām al-ʿāmm*) (ibid. 93).

Although the terminology of this law from 1955 links it to the Ottoman millet system, it curtails the applicability of non-Muslim law in modern Egypt considerably. As Berger has argued, the concept of public policy has been interpreted in a restrictive manner with the aim of "unifying" Egypt's multiple personal statute laws. As part of this policy, the Family Courts were merged into the national court system in 1956. In preceding decades, Egyptian legal practice had already removed the following aspects from the realm of "special law" and reclassified them as falling under "general law": guardianship (1925, 1952); intestate succession (1943); bequest (1946); and family names, family ties and legal capacity (1949) (ibid. 94).

Even with regard to marriage and divorce, the application of Christian law (the number of Jews in Egypt dwindling to insignificance in the second half of the twentieth century) has been narrowed down to cases in which both parties belong to the same sect and rite. "This means that non-Muslim law does not apply to the marriages of non-Muslim spouses who are of different religion (e.g., Christian and Jew), of different rite (e.g., Catholic and Protestant), or even of different sect (e.g., Coptic-Orthodox and Greek-Orthodox)" (ibid. 97). At the same time, in cases where Christian family law does still apply, Egyptian legal practice has denied the parties involved the right to opt for Islamic law. Thus, for example, modern Egyptian law does not permit Catholic Egyptians to divorce, because Catholic law does not allow divorce (ibid. 122). Thus only a few vestiges of the Ottoman millet system remain, but these are defended by the highest Egyptian court.

*Conclusion*

There are two turning-points in the history of the legal status of non-Muslim communities in the Islamic Middle East. The first is the Reform Decree of 1856, which represented a significant departure from established legal practice. The decree had an impact on all three domains of autonomy: religious theory and practice, administration and taxation, and legal jurisdiction.

The second turning-point was the end of the Ottoman Empire, or in some cases independence from it at a slightly earlier stage. From that moment each successor state has developed its own approach to its non-Muslim subjects, but the millet system probably survived the political transition at least for a while.

The decades before the official start of the Tanẓimāt constitute a turning-point which is less tangible, but it was crucial for later developments. During this period the Western Powers increasingly intervened with the Ottoman authorities on behalf of the sultan's Christian and Jewish subjects, insisting on an amelioration of their legal status. The non-Muslims' inequality was the West's principle pretext for giving these groups foreign 'protection'. Foreign support undoubtedly also fanned Christian and Jewish self-consciousness, strengthening their ambition for a better position. The demand for equality before the law of all Ottoman subjects became stronger, and the Gülhane Edict of 1839 was the Ottoman answer. Few would have predicted its outcome. While Christian and Jewish communities were increasingly defining—or 'inventing' to use Benedict Anderson's term—their own traditions and ambitions, the Ottoman authorities set about implementing its policies of equality before the law. Just when the non-Muslims were fostering their specialness, they lost more and more of their autonomy as their 'special laws' were gradually stripped.

Legal developments with regard to non-Muslim subjects differed from one successor state of the Ottoman Empire to another. In some cases, large parts of the millet system have survived until today. In Lebanon, for example, article 9 of the constitution "guarantees that the personal status and religious interests of the population, to whatever religious sect they belong, is respected." In Israel, too, the legal system for non-Muslim marriage and divorce continues to be based on the Ottoman millet system (Hofri-Winogradow 2010). In other cases, successor states have gradually done away with the old arrangements and passed new laws on the status of non-Muslim subjects. This is the case in Egypt, where the Ottoman system was confirmed by law in 1915, but was dismantled gradually in the course of the twentieth century. Step by step, legal issues which originally belonged to the realm of "special law", i.e. Egypt's Christian laws, were moved to that of "general law". Today, only a limited application of Christian family law is all that has remained in Egypt of what was once the Ottoman millet system.

Ironically, the conclusion of these legal developments, which started in the early 19th century, now coincides with the feeling among many non-Muslim communities in the Middle East that they are entitled to maintain

their own group culture and identity, including a number of "special" legal practices. This feeling of entitlement feeds emotional debates in which moral views tend to take precedence over dispassionate arguments. To portray the Christians of the modern Middle East, and other 'minorities' for that matter, solely as victims of these developments (Phares 1999; Bat Ye'or quoted in Phares 1999 and Rowe 2007) is historically incorrect. The process was characterized by constant negotiations and renegotiations between the state and the non-Muslim communities, who were not powerless to resist the State. In several instances, the perceived benefits for the non-Muslims of individual steps in the process are easy to identify. Such internal dynamics should also be taken into account if we want to understand the mechanisms of power. In the modern period the process was continued between new nation states and their non-Muslim populations. The outcomes in various successor states of the Ottoman Empire are discussed in several chapters of this book below.

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## FROM THE *DHIMMA* TO THE CAPITULATIONS: MEMORY AND EXPERIENCE OF PROTECTION IN LEBANON

Anh Nga Longva

### *Introduction*

In November 2007, the mandate of Lebanon's president Emile Lahoud came to an end, and the National Assembly was scheduled to elect a new president. As political disagreement worsened and the election kept being postponed, the Lebanese capital witnessed a constant flow of foreign dignitaries who came to express their support to the pro-Western Siniora government. The then French foreign minister, Bernard Kouchner, flew in from Paris no less than five times between May and November 2007. Several of his European and Arab counterparts followed suit, albeit at a slower pace. These diplomatic activities were meant as warning signals to the Iranian and Syrian allies of the Hizbollah-led opposition. The rival Lebanese parties have once again mobilized powerful external allies in their internal struggles.

Much has been written about the complexity of Lebanon's political life and its capacity to weather the most violent crises. Observers have occasionally remarked on the Lebanese's resort to foreign intervention in their domestic disputes, but there are few in-depth analyses of the phenomenon. And yet foreign intervention with the aim of protecting one of the contending parties runs like a red thread through the narratives on Lebanon's political and social life, in particular as regards some Christian communities. The first overt European intervention in Lebanon took place in 1860 after a series of severe clashes between Druzes and Maronites, when the European Powers pressured the Ottoman authorities to turn Mount Lebanon into an autonomous district under international supervision. Half a century later, at the end of World War I, intervention took the form of a decision by the League of Nations to give the mandate of Greater Syria to France. This intervention culminated when France severed Lebanon from Syria and placed political power in the new republic in the hands of the Maronite Catholics. The above processes were all part and parcel of a wider European policy of pro-Christian intervention in the Ottoman

Empire, starting from the seventeenth century. A blend of religious solidarity and political imperialism, this policy must be viewed in relation to a practice which had prevailed in the region for more than a thousand years: from the seventh to the early twentieth century, Christians, Jews, and to a certain extent, Zoroastrians, known collectively as the Peoples of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*) lived under a particular regime of Islamic protection arising from the *dhimma*, a 'contract' between the Muslim rulers and their non-Muslim populations. European intervention took place toward the end of this period, in the last 150 years or so before the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. During that period, the Christians experienced another form of protection, arising this time from the capitulations, bilateral treaties signed between the European Powers and the Porte.

Over the centuries the condition of being protected had become not only a way of life but also a social characteristic of the 'protected' populations. Protection, with all its ambiguities and complexities, not only shaped ways of being in daily encounters; it also defined the existential horizon of those to which it applied. Today a thing of the past, protection or memory of it, still plays a role in the construction of Christians' collective identity. But we must beware of generalizations. The Christian communities in the Middle East are a highly diverse world. Regarding memory of protection, there are perceptible differences between the two largest Christian communities in Lebanon, the Maronites and the Greek Orthodox. While it is a well-known fact that memory is always subjective and that the memory of an experience is not the same as the experience in itself (see i.a. Ricoeur 2004), I argue in this chapter that the discrepancy between the Maronites' experience of Muslim protection and their memory of it is particularly striking, much more so than in the case of the Greek Orthodox. The Maronites were the Christian community which had the least direct experience with the status of protected people, yet they are also the community whose recollection of it is most vivid and bitter. In comparison, the Orthodox, whose forebears had a greater experience of the dhimmi status, seem to recall Muslim protection in a more nuanced fashion, if at all. And while present-day Maronite political and religious leaders are often preoccupied with securing the support or protection, of Western countries, this does not seem to be a matter of particular concern for most Greek Orthodox.[1] To understand this state of affairs, we need to

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[1] No social groups are homogeneous, and both the Maronite and the Greek Orthodox communities are internally diversified, also regarding views on protection. I am fully aware

compare the workings of the dhimma and the capitulations, and their impact on two Christian communities whose original historical differences were significantly sharpened by events in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the results of which are still visible today.

### The Dhimma

'Dhimma' is an Arabic word denoting a covenant of protection modeled on the way the Prophet Mohammed dealt with non-Muslims in his early conquests in the Arabian Peninsula. Through the dhimma, Muslim rulers grant hospitality and protection to members of other revealed religions, on condition that the latter acknowledged the domination of Islam.[2]

The dhimma grants non-Muslims the public right to live in Muslim territories, and the private rights to buy, sell, and own; to marry, have children, and inherit; and to have access to courts of law. Through the dhimma, Muslims promised not to harm the protected non-Muslims, not to infringe on their properties, and to protect them when they were attacked. In return, the *dhimmis* must meet a number of obligations, such as the payment of the poll-tax (*jizya*) and the land tax (*kharāj*), and loyalty to the Muslim commonwealth (*umma*) and its leaders. They also had to submit to a series of legally, politically and socially discriminating rules; they could not, for example, testify in court against Muslims, and they were excluded from high public offices. There were also rules about clothing and transportation (they were not allowed to use the green colour and to ride horses). Besides, dhimmis were not allowed to carry weapons, and they were exempted from serving in the Muslim army. Freedom to publicly perform their religious rituals was limited to certain occasions, and display of Christian or Jewish religious symbols was restricted. Finally there were regulations about religious buildings: repair and maintenance of existing churches/synagogues was allowed, but it was forbidden to build new ones.

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of the problem of using 'Maronites' and 'Greek Orthodox' as collective terms of reference, as they inevitably suggest uniformity of views and consensus. When I nonetheless do so, it is because comparative social analysis requires a degree of generalization about the objects of the comparison, as long as what is being generalized is treated as context-related trends and patterns and not as primordial traits.

[2] As Rabbath (1986) reminds us, the dhimma regime is not so much an expression of religious tolerance towards the ahl al-kitāb as a legal mechanism to justify their existence within a state which is exclusively Muslim.

In theory these legal restrictions were universal, but in practice their implementation varied considerably (Joseph 1983). It depended on the prevailing socio-economic and political circumstances as well as on the leaders' interpretation of the rules and their personal inclinations. Historical evidence shows that only a handful of the regulations, such as those about taxes, the prohibition to carry weapons, and exemption from conscription, were strictly and consistently observed; others were observed on and off; yet others were deliberately overlooked, for example the law against employing dhimmis in high state positions.[3] Likewise, the prohibition against the construction of new churches was frequently waived (Ma'oz 1968, Faroqhi 1994, Fattal 1995, Masters 2004). Of particular interest is the implementation of the dress code imposed on dhimmis. This is a major theme in most studies on the dhimma, and much has been written about the humiliating effect this had had on the dhimmi population. The existence of such a code is beyond doubt,[4] but there are indications that its implementation was often lax. According to Masters "the fact that the dress code was frequently invoked by governors eager to extract bribes from wealthy non-Muslims suggests [that] even in their daily costume Muslims and non-Muslims were not always easily identifiable to the outside observer" (2004: 43). In support of his claim, Masters cites the reaction typical for most European visitors to the region: "Whether Christians or Jews, [they] frequently noted with a degree of disgust and alarm that their erstwhile coreligionists were 'Turks' in all but name" (ibid.).

Officially the dhimma regime ended with the Tanzimat reforms of the mid-nineteenth century. Included in the reforms was the introduction of equality before the law for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. By the early twentieth century the rules regulating the dhimmis' dress-code and transportation, as well as all the restrictions to their freedom of worship had been officially abolished.[5] Non-Muslims were granted the right to testify in mixed courts in 1847, and the jiziya poll-tax was abolished by law in

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[3] Practically all the caliphs surrounded themselves with Christian secretaries, advisors, governors, even ministers (Braude & Lewis 1982, Inalcik & Quataert 1994).

[4] The use of clothing to distinguish between social categories and reinforce social hierarchies was common in pre-modern societies. Most well-known in Europe were the measures devised to distinguish Jews from Christians, e.g. the Jewish cap (*Judenhut*) and the yellow badge (*rota*). See Piponnier & Mane 1997.

[5] The construction of new churches in areas where Muslims lived was still subject to Istanbul's approval (Masters op. cit.).

1855 (Maʾoz 1968: 27).[6] Not unexpectedly, such radical and comprehensive reforms were difficult to implement throughout the vast Empire in a unified manner, and in many places they were not implemented at all. For the Tanzimat reforms were rejected by the majority population, who were Sunni Muslims. The reforms, which came amidst the general and steady degradation of the population's living condition throughout the Empire, triggered a series of sectarian violence. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, from Mosul to Jedda, through Nablus, Aleppo, Damascus, and Mount Lebanon, incidents were registered in which non-Muslims were attacked and killed, their properties looted and destroyed (Masters 2004). The most violent episodes occurred in Aleppo in 1850, in Mount Lebanon in 1840 and 1860,[7] and in Damascus in 1860. In Aleppo and Damascus, the Christians bore the brunt of the attacks, more so than the Jewish communities (Baron 1932–1933, Joseph 1983). This suggests that it was not the dhimmis' enjoyment of their newly obtained rights in itself that provoked the Muslims. Rather, there was a perception among the latter that the real authors of the reforms, of which the Christians were clearly the major beneficiaries, were their European protectors whose powerful presence was particularly felt in Syria and Palestine (Schlicht 1980, Makdisi 2000, Traboulsi 2007). Aleppo was then the headquarters of the European Catholic missions, while on the coast, Beirut, Sidon, Acre were not only the seats of European consular offices, but also export trade centres dominated by Christians almost to the exclusion of either Muslims or Jews (Masters op. cit.). Inland, Mount Lebanon in the aftermath of the 1860 events became, upon the demand by the European Powers,[8] a quasi-autonomous district under a new regime known as the *mutasarrifiyya*. The Mountain had now its own independent budget and administration, and its entire population, Christians as well as

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[6] Conscription of the dhimmis was not envisaged by the reforms, however, non-Muslims were still exempted, but now they had to pay a tax (the *bedel* tax). Not unjustifiably, critics have described the bedel as a post-Tanzimat avatar of the jizya (Maʾoz 1968).

[7] The conflicts in Mount Lebanon pitted the ever more prosperous Maronite peasants against their Druze landlords for economic and social reasons which were not related to the Tanzimat reforms. However, in 1860 the conflicts culminated in the massacre of not only Maronites but also other Christians at the hands of not only Druzes but also Sunni and Shiʿi Muslims (Fawaz 1994). The alliance between the three Muslim groups, which otherwise were separated by long, solid, mutual hostility, against the Christians in general is testimony to the widespread anger and frustration in large sections of the Muslim population, nurtured by decades of developments in favour of the Christians, especially in matters of trade and economy. The concretization and finalization of a long and complex process, the Tanzimat reforms seem to have been the straw that broke the camel's back. See Maʾoz 1968, Fawaz 1983, Masters 2004.

[8] These included France, Great Britain, Russia, Austria, and Prussia.

Muslims, was exempt from conscription (Salibi 1971). By law, it was to be governed by a Catholic governor appointed by the Porte and approved by the European Powers. It was plain to everyone that the Christians in Greater Syria enjoyed the backing of their powerful European protectors, who did not hesitate to interfere in local disputes, not only between Christians and Muslims but also between specific Christian Churches and even between factions within these Churches (Kuri 1991, 1996).

*The Capitulations* (al-imtiyāzāt al-ajnabiyya)

The meaning of the international law concept of capitulation does not derive from the verb to capitulate but from the Latin word for chapter or heading (*capitula*)—a capitulation being a text organized under distinct headings. The word 'capitulation' is often confusing. The Arabic term *al-imtiyazāt al-ajnabiyya*, lit. foreign privileges, gives a more accurate description of what it is we are dealing with: originally, the capitulations gave non-Muslim foreign merchants living and trading in Ottoman ter-ritories generous fiscal privileges.[9] They also exempted them from the taxations imposed on Ottoman non-Muslim subjects, in particular the jiziya poll-tax. The capitulations also protected non-Muslim merchants from the sultan's justice as long as the crimes committed were not against the sultan's subjects.

At first, the capitulations were purely commercial treaties.[10] After 1517, the rationale behind the capitulations changed in keeping with the position of the Ottoman Empire on the international stage. From the sixteenth century onwards, the sultan sought to build political and military alliances with powerful European states to counter his main rivals, the Austro-Hungarian and the Russian Empires. Capitulatory privileges were increasingly granted in exchange for political and military support. Most outstanding among the sultan's Western allies was France, with whose king Suleyman the

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[9]  During the Ottoman period, the customs duty for Muslim subjects was 2.5 percent of the value of the commodity (Inalcik 1994). Different rates were imposed on foreigners, which could reach 5 or 6 percent depending on the country to which they belonged. The capitulations brought that rate down to 3 percent, almost equal to the one paid by the sultan's subjects (Inalcik 1994, van den Boogert 2005).

[10]  Although the capitulations are famously identified with the Ottoman Empire, they did not originate with the Ottomans. As early as 1082, the Byzantines granted Venetian mer-chants preferential treatment in trade and exemptions from tariffs paid by natives. Similar privileges were also granted by the Mamluks to France, Venice and Florence (Inalcik & Quataert 1994).

Magnificent signed the first politically motivated capitulation in 1536. The other European states quickly followed the French example and, by the nineteenth century, most of the major countries around the world, including the United States and India, had entered into capitulatory relations with the Ottoman Empire. In contrast, Russia signed its first capitulation treaty with the sultan in 1774, two hundred and fifty years after France. As will become clear, this difference was to have important consequences for the positions of the Maronite Catholic and the Greek Orthodox communities in Lebanon. As time went and the European Powers sought to weaken the Ottoman Empire, they pressed for the extension of fiscal privileges and capitulatory protection to the non-Muslim subjects of the sultan as well. Protection was given the Ottoman dhimmis by the European chanceries on the basis of religious identification. Thus France, Italy, Austria and Spain were protectors of the Catholics, Russia the protector of the Orthodox, and Great Britain, the protector of the Protestants and, from 1860, of the Jews as well.[11] From the late nineteenth century onwards, the small Protestant community would benefit from American, in addition to British, protection.

It is not quite clear when or under what pretext capitulatory protection was extended to Ottoman non-Muslim subjects. McGowan (1994: 695) suggests that this took place around 1740 when pashas in the major Ottoman ports extorted the illegal levies known as *avania*s from the communities of European merchants living in their jurisdiction. Also victims of this extortion were the Ottoman Christians who acted as their agents. The foreign embassies stepped in, and exercising their consular jurisdiction, extended legal protection over an ever growing number of protégés from the Christian minorities. Included in this capitulary protection were tax-exemption and other fiscal privileges (ibid: 696). Regardless of when the practice was initiated, it must have spread quite rapidly in the Ottoman trading centres for, by the late eighteenth century, it was observed both in the Balkans and the Middle East (van den Boogert 2003, Faroqhi 2004). From then on there grew around the European diplomatic missions throughout the Empire large communities of Ottoman protégés who availed themselves of their identification with their powerful foreign protectors to build

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[11] Earlier, Arabic-speakers customarily referred to the Protestants as *taʾifat al-ingliz* (the English sect) and to the Catholics as *taʾifat al-afranj* (the French sect) (Masters 2004). The only European support (though not protection in the sense used here) that was unrelated to religious affiliation was the one given briefly by Britain to the Druzes of Mount Lebanon in their war against the Maronites in the mid-nineteenth century.

successful careers and prosperous lives. Through the principles of immunity and extraterritoriality many were also beyond the reach of Ottoman justice (Masters 2004). European ambassadors and consuls became powerful patrons surrounded by a community of protégés the size of which became a matter of jealous competition among the European diplomatic missions in the Ottoman cities and ports (Faroqhi op. cit.: 60, 144 ff). In addition to the task of adjudicating disputes between members of their communities, the consuls also oversaw the maintenance and running of schools and other social institutions funded and established by the community and for the community (orphanages, dispensaries). They also kept close contact with the leaders of the Church associated with their country; the consuls' views were crucial in the selection of these leaders, and more often than not they interfered directly in the local conflicts, usually at the request of the Ottoman protégés themselves.

### Experiencing the Dhimma and the Capitulations

Little is known about the non-Muslims' experience of the dhimma protection before the seventeenth century. Available studies, many of them authored by Westerners, deal with the later period. While the best academic literature on the restrictions of the dhimma underscores the difference between theory and practice, publications aiming at a wider popular readership regularly fail to do so. They tend to oppose Muslims and Christians/Jews as monolithic categories, and little effort is made to place the studies in their proper historical, sociological, and political contexts. The legal restrictions of the dhimma being devised to draw a clear distinction between Muslims[12] and non-Muslims, it follows that their implementation was more common in cities and towns with a mixed population than in isolated rural villages, as these were practically always religiously homogeneous. In the case of Maronites and Greek Orthodox, Mount Lebanon and Beirut respectively provide typical illustrations.

   Nineteenth century Beirut had a population consisting largely of Sunni Muslims and Greek Orthodox. Whereas there are a good many studies on relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in key cities like Aleppo and

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[12] Under Ottoman rule, 'Muslims' means 'Sunni Muslims'; the non-Sunni, 'heterodox', branches of Islam did not enjoy official recognition.

Damascus, evidence of the same is sparser regarding the periphery of the Empire, such as the coastal cities of Tripoli, Beirut, Sidon, and Tyre. Nevertheless, instances of tension between Muslims and Christians in Beirut, especially in the mid-nineteenth century, are mentioned in the literature. Maʾoz quotes a report written by an unnamed European in 1853 according to which "thirteen years of peace, commercial emulation and industry had contributed to soften down the intolerance and hatred which the Mussulman of Beyrout were wont to exhibit towards their Christian countrymen and the foreigners" (Maʾoz 1968: 201). We are also told that when violence erupted in the Mountain between Druzes and Maronites in July 1860, the atmosphere was tense in Beirut and "many Christians locked themselves in their homes, awaiting to be slaughtered" (Fawaz 1994: 75). No massacres ensued, but when the body of an assassinated Muslim was found near the souks, the mob reacted by killing a Maronite passer-by (Kassir 2003: 274). In his study of class in Beirut from 1840 to 1985, Michael Johnson writes that "communal fighting between Beiruti Christians and Muslims seemed a fact of life" (1986: 19). The sources seem to agree that there were tensions between Muslims and Christians, especially among the working class, in Lebanese urban centres in the turbulent late nineteenth century, but they do not tell us whether the dhimma regulations were implemented before the Tanzimat reforms and, if they were, how strictly. The Levantine ports have always had a religiously mixed population. This, and the fact that they were not, before the Tanzimat, important administrative centres on the par with Aleppo or Damascus, seems to indicate that the implementation of the dhimma regulations may have been lax, and that only the basic discriminations, such as the payment of the jizya, the inability to testify in courts, and the prohibition against carrying weapons, were observed. On the other hand, identification of self and others in the Levantine ports could not have differed from other towns through the Empire, and was premised, here as elsewhere, on religious belonging and on the rights and duties, roles and statuses that went with it. That the Christians of Beirut, most of whom were Greek Orthodox, feared for their security in times of heightened tension in the Mountain is an indication of their collective self-awareness as dhimmis. It shows that the social organization of urban life, rather than underplaying the religious identity of the interacting groups, threw it more sharply into relief. Life in multi-confessional towns required that the inhabitants be constantly aware of others' values and sensibilities, and of the place each group occupied in society.

The Maronites did not suffer from similar restrictions and have always taken pride in their history of independence. Prior to the 1830s, the Maronites were a rural population that, in their large majority, inhabited Mount Lebanon (Touma 1986). This 3.000 metres high, rugged mountain was of difficult access, and few Muslim rulers had tried to govern it directly. The Mountain therefore provided an ideal sanctuary for splinter groups. It is no coincidence that the local inhabitants (Shiʿis, Druzes, and Maronites) were all considered as belonging to sects more or less condemned by the ruling orthodoxies, whether Muslim or Christian. The Mountain was always under the control of the central powers, be they Byzantine, Mamluk or Ottoman. After the conquest of Syria by the Ottomans in 1516, the Porte was, on the whole, content with indirect rule through local leaders whose task was to collect taxes and forward them to the Ottoman governor in Tripoli or Saida (Touma op. cit.). As long as these expectations were met, the inhabitants of the Mountain, especially the Maronites, were left alone,[13] and the negative aspects of the dhimma impinged minimally on their existence (Fawaz 1994). An account by the French poet Lamartine, an admirer and friend of the Maronites who visited Mount Lebanon in the 1830s, describes them as

> a happy nation. They are feared by their masters who do not dare to settle down in their provinces; their religion is practised freely and is respected; their cloisters and churches cover the top of the hills; their [church] bells, which are loved because they are an expression of liberty and independence, announce prayer times day and night [to the people] in the valleys; they are ruled by their own leaders who are chosen according to tradition or are issued from the most important families (quoted in Touma op. cit.: 21, my translation).

In the words of Bruce Masters, "the elites of the [Maronite] community could flaunt in their mountain redoubts their disregard for many of the legal restrictions imposed on non-Muslims elsewhere—building new churches and monasteries, openly carrying arms, and riding horses" (Masters 2004: 43). And Masters concludes: "[W]hat was unthinkable in the rest of the sultan's domains could occur almost seamlessly in Mount Lebanon", and the Maronites exhibited, "in the eyes of the Sunni Muslims,

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[13] According to Salibi (1988) Ottoman punitive expeditions against the Shiʿis and the Druzes were more common. The Maronites were treated with greater caution because of their European connections.

an arrogance unknown among, or undreamed by Christians elsewhere in the Arab world" (op.cit: 44).[14]

The Maronites' migration from Mount Lebanon to the coast, which was at first insignificant and gradual, happened in conjunction with the development of export trade to Europe. They came to Beirut around 1830, originally to work in the silk industry, which developed in response to French commercial interest in this raw material (Salibi 1988). It was the 1860 sectarian conflict in Mount Lebanon that triggered the biggest wave of Maronite migration to Beirut, a move which was later accelerated by famine during World War I. Can we assume that, once in Beirut, the Maronites experienced the humiliations from which they had been previously spared, and that this explains why the dhimma has left such a negative imprint on their collective memory? This is unlikely for two simple reasons: by 1860 the Tanzimat reforms had been introduced, and Beirut was one of the places where the reforms were actually put into practice (Kassir 2003). Besides, whereas the last half century of the Ottoman Empire was a time of turmoil and sectarian conflicts in several Ottoman provinces, not least Eastern Anatolia, for Lebanon the years under the *mutasarrifiyya* (1861–1915) were a period of unprecedented peace and prosperity (Akarlı 1993). It was during this peaceful interval that the Maronites rose to social and political prominence (Touma 1986, Salibi 1988), a fact that would have been unlikely if they had been subjected to discrimination on account of their being Christian.

It seems safe to conclude that, comparatively speaking, the Christians of Lebanon were less exposed to the dhimma than their coreligionists elsewhere in the Empire. In so far as any Christian community in today's Lebanon had had direct experience of the dhimma regime before the Tanzimat, it was the town-dwelling Greek Orthodox along the coast rather than the rural Maronites in their confessionally homogeneous villages in Mount Lebanon.

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[14]  While most writers agree with Masters, Touma gives a more qualified picture. Under the rule of some governors, he writes, Maronite villages could be pillaged, their churches destroyed, and their leaders massacred. Nevertheless Touma acknowledges that on the whole "in their domains, the Maronites were almost independent", thanks partly to their strategic decision not to build roads in the Mountain, thus making it practically impossible for anyone to reach their villages (Touma 1986).

## Two Different Church Histories

A comparison between the Maronite and the Greek Orthodox communities must take into account the vastly different histories of their Churches. The Maronites were, until the seventeenth century, a small, isolated local Church, a product of the series of Christological conflicts which divided Christianity in the fifth century. Originating in the Orontes Valley in Northern Syria around the same period, the followers of Saint Maroun, fleeing from Byzantine persecution, gradually moved to Mount Lebanon,[15] and have ever since regarded the Mountain as their home territory and the cradle of their religious and cultural tradition. It was through contacts with European Catholics, first the French crusaders then the Vatican, with which their Church entered in a Union in the twelfth century, that the Maronites eventually emerged from their isolation and acquired a role on the regional stage.[16] But the Maronite Church always remained a Lebanese Church, geographically centred upon Lebanon, and united under a patriarchal leadership that has been Syro-Lebanese from the beginning. With a strong clerical leadership that was socially and culturally close to its flock, a distinctive liturgical language (Syriac), a territory of its own (the Northern part of Mount Lebanon), and a membership nearly entirely concentrated within this territory,[17] the Maronite Church was, from early on, well equipped to instil a strong sense of collective identity in its followers. Being the only Catholic 'nation' in the Middle East before the very end of the seventeenth century, the Maronites were a minority not only in relation to Islam but also to Eastern Orthodox Christianity. In a sense, they suffered from a double religious marginalization within their immediate environment, which explains why they have tended to look for protectors from outside the region. The support they received from the Vatican—pope Leo X

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[15]  In espousing the doctrine of monotheletism which was condemned as heresy by Byzantium, the Maronites became one of the multiple outlaw Christian communities exposed to the wrath of Orthodox officialdom.

[16]  Allegiance to the Vatican was rewarded by the creation in 1584 of the Maronite College in Rome, where Maronites priests were sent to be trained in the Roman ecclesiastical disciplines. These clerics were, upon their return, the first agents of Westernization in Mount Lebanon (Haddad 1970, Kuri 1991).

[17]  There are small Maronite pockets in Syria, Palestine, and Cyprus. Besides, the Lebanese diaspora throughout the world comprises a large number of Maronites within its ranks. But all Maronites acknowledge the authority of the Patriarch whose see is in Bkirké, North of Beirut. As a Catholic Church, the Maronites owe allegiance to the Vatican, but, for many, the Pope is a rather distant figure while the Patriarch is considered as their real leader, not only spiritually but also politically.

in 1510 described the Maronite Church as 'a rose among thorns' (Valognes 1994), the thorns being not the Muslims but the Orthodox Christians—and from France, whom the Maronites used to refer to as 'the tender loving mother' (*al-umm al-hanun*) (ibid.), played a crucial role in the Maronites' self-perception as different but by no means inferior. This collective self-perception was strengthened when, in the aftermath of the massacres of Christians by Druzes in 1860, France despatched 6000 troops and numerous Catholic missionaries to Beirut to assist the victims. With the post-1860 developments in Mount Lebanon, self-awareness among the Maronites took a more political turn. The successful experience of the mutasarrifiyya led the religious and intellectual elite to thirst for complete autonomy. Thereby, the ground for a Maronite brand of nationalism, nurtured by strong ethnic awareness, was laid. When the ideology of nationalism was introduced to the Middle East around World War I, its defining demand, that the political, territorial, and cultural boundaries of the state be identical, was not only in tune with the Maronites' self-perception; it was also a project whose achievement could realistically be considered, thanks to the groundwork done over the centuries by the Maronite Church.

The situation is very different for the Greek Orthodox Church. We are dealing here with not one but four autocephalous Churches practising the Byzantine rite. Although united under the same denomination ('the Eastern Orthodox Church'), each Church has its own patriarchate—Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem and Istanbul—the last one being *primus inter pares* in relation to the other three.[18] In a region with a vast number of both Muslim and Christian religious splinter groups labelled 'heterodox' or even 'heretic', the two undisputed orthodoxies have been Sunni Islam and Orthodox Christianity. Unlike the Maronite Church, which had been persecuted by the Byzantines on the one hand, and repeatedly summoned by the Vatican to give proof of its obedience to the true Roman Catholic doctrine on the other hand, the Greek Orthodox Church was never called to doctrinal account by anyone in the Middle East. On the contrary, its brutal and relentless persecution of 'heretics' drove the dissenting Churches to welcome the Islamic conquest (Joseph 1983, Runciman 2000). In the eyes of Muslims and Christians alike, the Greek Orthodox Church was first and foremost an imperial Church, associated with the Byzantine Empire, hence

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[18] Syria and Lebanon, but also Iraq and Kuwait are part of the patriarchate of Antioch. This makes Antioch the prime Arab Orthodox patriarchate. On the ethnic nature of the Orthodox patriarchates see Valognes 1994.

the adjective 'Melkite', from Arabic *malaki* (royal), traditionally applied to it. Even after the fall of Byzantium in 1453, it did not lose its characteristically privileged relationship to the ruling powers: the Ottoman sultans granted the Greek Orthodox patriarch in Istanbul full recognition, and, by investing him with politico-religious jurisdiction over the whole Orthodox community, they gave his Church a legitimate position within the Ottoman imperial system. Hence this Church's tendency, according to its critics, to enter into compromises with the Muslim power-holders (Valognes 1994). Even though the series of Russo-Ottoman conflicts from the latter half of the nineteenth century onwards placed the Greek Orthodox in an uncomfortable position, it was first and foremost the Armenians, not the Arab Orthodox, whose loyalty was questioned by the Porte. As long as the Ottoman Empire existed, the problems faced by the Orthodox Church of Antioch thus did not lie primarily in its relations with Muslims but with other Christians.

The major problem was the ethnic gap between the Antioch Church leaders, who between 1725 and 1900 were entirely Hellenic, and the ordinary Church members, who were entirely Arab. As a result, patriarchs and bishops shared neither the language nor the culture of their flock. They were in fact rather ignorant of the latter's living conditions and, on the whole, indifferent to their daily concerns (Hopwood 1969, Salibi 1988).

A second problem was the challenge of the Roman Catholic Church. For historical reasons, which date back to the Great Schism between Rome and Constantinople in 1054 and the sack of Constantinople by the crusaders in 1204, relations were strained between the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church. When the Catholic missionaries returned to the Middle East in the seventeenth century after an absence of several centuries, it was with the unflattering perception of Eastern Christians as 'heretics'. Their pronounced aim was not to convert Muslims but to cleanse the Eastern Christian doctrines and rituals, said to be tainted by centuries of coexistence with Islam, and put them back on the right Catholic path. The animosity between the two Churches worsened as the Catholics' work among the Orthodox began to bear fruit: what started as a trickle of individual conversions turned into wholesale defection when large groups, usually among the wealthiest, in the various Eastern Orthodox Churches seceded to establish the so-called Uniate Churches (Haddad 1970, 1982, Joseph 1983).[19] Within approximately

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[19]  The Uniate Churches sought Union with Rome and bear the official adjective 'Catholic', but kept their own liturgies in their respective languages and their own hierarchical organization with their different patriarchs.

one hundred years, from the late seventeenth to the late eighteenth century, all the Eastern Churches went through a momentous split, each of them having as a result an Orthodox and a Catholic branch.[20] The seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which corresponded respectively to the introduction, development, and triumph of the capitulatory regime, thus witnessed the weakening and division of the Orthodox Church, the erstwhile powerful face of Eastern Christianity. During the same period, the Maronite Church went from being a local, inward-looking Church hidden in the inaccessible gorges of Mount Lebanon to being a Church with a political voice which ultimately would secure the Maronites a state of their own.

Not surprisingly, the substantial differences in the two Church histories impacted on their communities' self-perception and self-definition. The Orthodox Church has always looked upon itself as a truly Eastern Church, and most Middle Eastern Orthodox see themselves as Arab, ethnically and culturally.[21] Although the Maronite Church also calls itself an Eastern Church, its early affiliation to the Vatican and the benefits it has consistently drawn from this privileged relationship do speak for its being placed in a distinct category. The Church's connection to the European Catholic world has always featured prominently both in the Maronites' self-perception and in their perception by other Christians. Unlike most Greek Orthodox Lebanese, many Maronite Lebanese claim to be of non-Arab descent,[22] a claim that harmonizes with several of their historical choices. When conflicts arose between local Muslims and Western outsiders, the Maronites have tended to side with the latter. An example of this is the Maronite strong support for the French mandate after World War I. As head of the Lebanese delegation at the 1919 Peace Congress in Versailles, the Maronite patriarch Elias Howayek (1889–1931) vehemently argued against the inclusion of Lebanon in a planned Arab kingdom centred on Damascus (Longrigg 1972). He instead advocated the creation of a sovereign Lebanon, distinct

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[20]   The Chaldean Catholic Church was formed in 1692, the Greek Catholic Church, in 1726, the Armenian Catholic Church in 1742, the Syriac Catholic Church in 1781, etc. (Valognes 1994). Only the Maronite Church, which officially proclaimed its doctrinal allegiance to Rome in the twelfth century, does not have an Orthodox branch.

[21]   The Arab Orthodox call themselves *Rum*; in Lebanon, another common self-designation is *Bani Ghassān*, i.e. descendents of the pre-Islamic invaders of Syria who founded the Christian kingdoms of Hira and Ghassan between Mesopotamia and Damascus. Lebanese (and other Levantine) Orthodox thus reject the thesis according to which they were originally Greeks who had lost their language and become Arabized (*musta'arabun*) (Hopwood 1969).

[22]   They claim to descend from the Mardaïtes or from the Phoenicians. See Firro 2003.

from Syria and with close ties to France (Zamir 2000). The majority of the Orthodox meanwhile tended to support the integrity of Greater Syria, and their intellectual elite championed the ideology of Arabism against the Maronites' 'Lebanonism'.[23] Michel Aflaq, the major founder of Ba'thism, was a Syro-Lebanese Greek Orthodox. During the 1975–1990 Civil War, prominent figures of the Orthodox Church supported the Palestinian cause, while the Maronite patriarchs have always opposed the prospect of Lebanon being turned into a battleground between Palestinians and Israelis. In the course of the twentieth century both Greek Orthodox and Maronites took active part in various nationalist movements. But while the former have tended to support universalist ideologies, the latter have tended to support ideologies built on particularistic, especially confessional, identities. Strictly speaking, the choice between the two forms of nationalism is not a Church matter. But as the history of the communities is closely intertwined with the history of their Churches, and as politics in Lebanon is routinely conducted along confessional lines, the ideal shape of the state for many is modelled on the actual shape of the Churches.

*The Construction of Collective Memory*

Church histories are of undeniable importance, but they are not the only constitutive element in the formation of popular memory. We also need to take into account people's experience of daily life in the course of which individuals, families, communities deal with their limitations and exploit their possibilities in a specific context shaped by material and political circumstances over which they have little or no control. One could have expected the Maronites who, for centuries, led a quasi-autonomous existence in Mount Lebanon, and who are the only Christian community in the Middle East to have genuine access to political power in a post-colonial state, to hold memories of the dhimma that are neither particularly vivid nor particularly negative. Yet they are the Christian community in Lebanon whose charter of identity gives a critical place to the dhimma and its indignities. It was a Maronite, Beshir Gemayel,[24] who allegedly coined the

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[23]  We are dealing here only with trends, not with wholesale communal positioning. There were Maronites, Greek Orthodox, Sunnis and Shi'is among supporters of both Arabism and Lebanonism. See Eddé (2010).

[24]  Beshir Gemayel was Lebanon's president-elect when he was assassinated in 1982 at the height of the Civil War. He was a prominent member of the Maronite *Kataeb* party

term 'dhimmitude' ('oppressive protection'). In his biography of the assassinated president-elect, Selim Abou writes:

> Attempts at Islamizing Lebanon […] reminded Bechir of the tales of humiliation suffered by Christian dhimmis under the Ottomans. These tales, all the Christian youths of Lebanon have heard them told again and again by their grandparents. They are deeply rooted in the collective unconscious of Lebanese Christians, just as the massacres of 1840 and 1860 and are part of the tragic legacy [of Eastern Christianity]. In his last improvised speech, Bechir [said that Lebanon], without being necessarily a 'Christian national home' must be "a real country for the Christians, where we can hold our heads high, without anyone telling us […] 'walk on the left side', as we used to be told in the days of the Turks, because we were Christians; without anyone telling us to wear a distinctive sign or clothing to distinguish us as Christians; without our being subject to the 'dhimmitude' of others. From now on we refuse to live under any one's dhimmitude. We no longer want to be under anyone's protection" (p. 308, my translation).

While the dhimma protection is depicted as oppressive, French protection, as we have seen, is compared to a mother's tender loving care. In the corpus of French-language literature on the Maronites, written by both Lebanese and French authors prior to the Civil War, France is often depicted as a selfless protector of the weak. In reviewing the reasons which prompted the French to lend their support to the Maronites in the past, a Lebanese writer includes in the list France's "undying ideal of protecting the weak and assisting the oppressed" (Chebli 1984: 40). But as we have seen, the Maronites were among the least oppressed Christian communities in the Middle East,[25] and, according to their own sources, they were certainly not weak. How then do we explain the discrepancy between the experience and the memory of the dhimma among Maronites?

As the only Christian community in the Middle East with genuine political power, the Maronites may feel that it is their duty to speak up on behalf of all Christians, and to take upon themselves the burden of keeping alive the memory of past discriminations and subjugation, regardless of their own historical experience. Another reason may be that the Maronites, unlike the Orthodox, are equipped with formal political parties, especially

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(founded by his father Pierre), and commander of the Lebanese Forces, the powerful Christian militia.

[25] This is, of course, not the same as saying that the Maronite villagers enjoyed absolute peace and freedom in the Mountain. Their history was marked by conflicts and tyranny. But until at least the late eighteenth century, the conflicts were often internal, and the tyranny was mostly at the hands of Maronite feudal lords. See Traboulsi 2007.

the Kataeb (Phalanges) and, during the 1975–1990 Civil War, with armed militias as well. These organizations need a clearly formulated ideology and an identifiable enemy to motivate their members and keep up their fighting spirit. As their opponents were Muslims under various political denominations, the dhimma and its litany of humiliations fulfilled this function rather effectively. This being said, talk of the dhimma humiliations is not limited to Maronite politicians or to the war period; it is still familiar among ordinary Maronites today. To explain the Maronite memory of the dhimma by appealing to its instrumental function is relevant but insufficient. Selim Abou writes of "tales of humiliation" which Lebanese youths have been told "again and again" by their grandparents, and which are "deeply rooted in the collective unconscious of Lebanese Christians". His description echoes narratives which are still current in some Maronite milieux. There is no dearth of tales of dhimmi humiliation and suffering in the Middle East. The persecution and massacres of Christians in the unravelling years of the Ottoman Empire constitute one major source. In the past, these tales were no doubt widely circulated in all Christian circles, Catholic as well as Orthodox. Yet they appear to be most vividly remembered among the Maronites, to the extent that one of their leaders had felt the need to coin a special word to sum up the feelings depicted in these tales. I suggest that a good deal of the explanation for this lies in education.

Before the seventeenth century, the Western world could not and did not claim superiority over the Ottoman world. The first signs of change appeared in the latter half of the sixteenth century, and from then on, Europe surpassed its rival by all accounts, economically, militarily, politically. As the Europeans made their presence increasingly felt in Levantine trade, and merchants and missionaries became more or less permanent features of Ottoman society, Westernization, i.e. the ability to understand, communicate, and interact with Europeans, became not just a valuable asset but also a cultural trait used for defining, categorizing, and assessing the various communities among themselves. The main way to acquire this asset was through education. Prior to the nineteenth century, education in the Ottoman Middle East had been religious (Davison 1961).[26] What people wanted from now on was a pragmatically devised education, which would allow them to improve their living standard and deal with the rapidly changing circumstances.

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[26] For more on education in the Middle East, see Le Thomas, this volume.

Modern education, which in the early nineteenth century meant first and foremost the acquisition of European languages (Italian, French, English) and accounting skills, came to the Middle East through a major channel, Christian missionaries (Labaki 1988).[27] Whether they were Catholic, Protestant, or Orthodox, these missionaries' presence and activities in the Ottoman territories were made possible through the capitulations. Access to education, like access to European protection, depended largely on the dhimmis' confessional membership. It is widely agreed that the Catholics had a clear advantage over the other communities in this regard. Catholic schools were oldest, most numerous, and they were the most effectively organized. A distinctive feature of Catholic education in Lebanon is the extent to which it penetrated the local society at a time when most of the rest of the population was still illiterate. The activities of European (mostly French) missionaries are often cited as the main reason for this feat. Indeed, from early on, so-called *petites écoles*, mountain village elementary schools, were launched, especially by Jesuits, to teach Maronite children even in the remotest corners of the Mountain. They were run by itinerant European priests and the local population together (Verdeil 2003), and theirs was a modest but realistic ambition—basic literacy. We must not, however, forget that the Maronite Church itself also played an important part in this process. In 1736, it declared education to be one of its major tasks and had been working accordingly since then. As a result, by the late nineteenth century, a relatively large number of Maronites had had a degree of schooling. In their case, modern education, no matter how basic, was not limited to the wealthy few in the towns; through the conjugated activities of European/ French missionaries and the local Church, quasi-universal literacy among Maronites was within reach by the early twentieth century.

Inevitably, the education imparted by Catholic missionaries came with a normative subtext, even when what was being taught were down-to-earth subjects such as computing and accounting. This was even more the case when the subject was religion which, naturally enough, was an important subject in all mission schools. This subtext is about the uniqueness of Christian values and identity, the position of Christians in a Muslim State, the relations between Muslim majority and Christian minorities, and the consequences of these relations on the dhimmis' individual life-chances

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[27]  In the late nineteenth–early twentieth centuries, the Ottomans did open schools which imparted modern education along European lines. But they were few and mostly attended by Ottoman youths destined for a career in the military or state administration. See Shaw & Shaw 1977, and Le Thomas in this volume.

and their collective identities. The more exposed to Western education a Christian youth was, the more likely s/he was to espouse the view of the dhimmi condition as a social handicap, even a severe existential hinder. Being the community which had had the longest and closest contact with European mission educators, the Maronites were also the community most acutely sensitized to the problem of the dhimma.

The Orthodox, meanwhile, drew little benefit from Catholic schools; at the same time they did not have many educational establishments of their own. In the nineteenth century Russia did finance the building of a few so-called *moskobiyya* (Moscovite) schools for Orthodox children in Beirut and other Syrian cities (Hopwood 1969), but this assistance was a mere trickle compared to the vast amount of educational activities deployed by the Catholic missions, notably the French Jesuits (Kuri 1991, 1996). Besides, teaching in the 'Moscovite' schools was dispensed in Arabic, and the foreign language taught was Russian. The well-to-do Orthodox families preferred to see their children learn French or English, therefore many chose to send them to the American Protestant schools. The Protestant missions in the Levant had two major aims, both closely interrelated: to make converts through education and the distribution of welfare, and to beat the French Catholic missions on their own turf. The Protestant educational policies were designed to serve these purposes. While Catholic education, directed overwhelmingly at the Maronites, insisted on Catholic exceptionalism within the local context—'a rose among thorns'—Protestant education, directed to all non-Catholics including Muslims, placed emphasis on the students' Arab identity. Each of the narratives corresponded to the experience and self-perception of the students, which made it all the easier for them to accept the message. Although the Protestants did not succeed in making many converts, their teaching helped sow the seeds that in time would contribute to the development of Arab nationalism (Salibi 1988).

The ethnic gap between the Hellenic hierarchy and the Arab followers of the Orthodox Church of Antioch mentioned earlier explains why the Orthodox patriarchs and their bishops showed little interest in the educa- tion and welfare of their flock, in striking contrast to the Maronite Church. Faced by their leaders' indifference, the Orthodox community pinned its educational hopes on Russia; but Russia was always more interested in the Balkans than in the Arab world, with the exception of the Holy Land (Hopwood 1969). Besides, the frequent wars between the Russians and the Ottomans put severe limitations on the Russians' ability to intervene on behalf of their Arab coreligionists. In the end, Russia's support to the

Orthodox in Lebanon and Syria was too little and too late. During the capitulations era European education, mostly through Protestant channels, reached the Orthodox in a limited and selective way.[28] We are not dealing here with efforts aiming at quasi-universal literacy, as in the case of the Maronites. The education imparted by European missions to the Maronites strengthened their perception of being different from, and un-integrated in, the local society, a state of affairs for which the practice of the dhimma was largely blamed. For those Orthodox who attended Protestant mission schools, such a message probably would not have had the same impact, as it ran counter to their understanding of their place in the world, and a self-awareness developed under very different historical circumstances.

*Conclusion*

For thirteen centuries the Christians in the Middle East were looked upon and treated as protected people. The dhimma meant group survival, but even though the treatment of dhimmis varied in time and place, the concept has become associated with legal vulnerability, political marginality, and social inferiority. The notion of protection has an ambivalent connotation for religious minorities in the Middle East, not least the Christians. Because historically they had been through not one but two different regimes of protection, one experienced as disabling and the other as empowering or potentially so, 'protection' elicits images of both domination and empowerment. The features of each regime are thrown into stark relief when seen in contradistinction to the other. The more the capitulatory protection yielded concrete improvements of the community's condition, as in the case of the Maronites, the more the dhimma protection is negatively portrayed. In this case, the empowering nature of the capitulations underscores all the constraining aspects of the dhimma. But when capitulatory protection yielded meagre and sometimes even negative results, as in the case of the Orthodox, the dhimma protection is remembered as just one social condition among others, with its advantages and disadvantages, its possibilities and its limitations. The experience of capitulatory protection is thus constitutive of the memory of dhimma protection. We should not disregard this dialectical relationship lest we deprive ourselves of an

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[28] Western education did not, for example, reach the Orthodox peasants of the Kura district or those in Hasbaya and other villages in Southern Lebanon with a strong Greek Orthodox component.

important perspective from which to comprehend and assess the role that protection still plays in the social imagination of several Christian minorities in the Middle East today.

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## CONTEMPORARY MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS IN EGYPT: LOCAL DYNAMICS AND FOREIGN INFLUENCES

### Grégoire Delhaye

### *Introduction*

Although they represent less than six percent of the Egyptian population, with some 4.5 million members, Copts are by far the largest Christian community in the Middle-East.[1] Ninety-five percent of them belong to the autonomous Coptic Orthodox Church, born of an early schism of Christianity in 451 CE at the Council of Chalcedon (Meinardus 1999). Copts are present everywhere in Egypt but are a majority nowhere except for a few villages in the southern governorates of Minia and Sohag. Significantly over represented in the south and in large cities like Cairo and Alexandria, Christians are, on the other hand, few in the Delta region (Denis 2000).

While generally well integrated in society, Copts nevertheless face some legal but mostly social forms of prejudice. As one commentator rightly put it, the situation of Copts in Egypt is one of "subtle yet entrenched discrimination" (Khalil 1998). But the extent to which individual Christians are discriminated against varies greatly along geographic, social, and economic lines. Larger towns are usually more welcoming than rural areas, and wealthy Copts are much less likely to experience discrimination, if any at all.

In the 1970's and 1980's, Islamic groups contesting the legitimacy of what they denounced as a secular, ungodly government, orchestrated violent attacks throughout the country, and Copts were among the prime targets. Because of the official discourse emphasizing national unity put forward by the authorities, targeting Copts also served the purpose of indirectly attacking the government. The massacre of foreign tourists at Luxor in

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[1] These figures are based on the 1996 Egyptian census, the last one for which religious data were made public. Higher numbers are often quoted by Copts and western media but demographers Courbage and Fargues, who have studied the issue, have confirmed the accuracy of the census figures (1998: 181).

1997 marked a turning point in the evolution of Islamist violence. The gruesome killing of foreigners, in a country where numerous people drew their livelihood from tourism, contributed to radical groups losing popular support and Islamist violence subsided (Kepel 2001: 413–443).

Violence against Copts did not totally disappear though. At the turn of the millennium, in the southern village of El-Kosheh, an argument between two shopkeepers, a Muslim and a Christian, escalated into a full fledged pogrom. Twenty-one died, twenty of them Copts. In October 2005, a crowd of Muslims attacked a church in Alexandria after an inflammatory sermon at the local mosque. The preacher had mentioned the existence of a Coptic-produced DVD of a play portraying a Christian youth converting to Islam for money before realizing his "mistake" (Roussillon 2006: 153–155). On January 7, 2010 in retaliation for a rape, the drive-by shooting of a Coptic Church in the southern town of Nag Hamadi claimed the lives of seven Coptic worshipers and a Muslim guard. On March 10, 2011, in the Moqatam neighborhood of Cairo, a pitchfork battle between Muslims and Christians protesting the earlier burning of a Church in another province left 13 dead and 140 wounded. Snowballing from seemingly minor events, a dispute, sometimes even mere rumors—such as recently about an affair between a Christian man and a Muslim woman—these clashes are examples of a type of sectarian violence that, unlike in the 1970s and 1980s, is not political in nature. These events are indeed not fueled by a political project but stem from an underlying tension fueled by negative stereotypes.

These events are commonly perceived as the result of the recent (re)islamization of Egyptian society and its impact on a persecuted and powerless Coptic minority. Against this widespread view, I wish to argue that sectarian tensions are in fact the product of parallel, century-old Islamic and Coptic revivals in which both Muslims and Copts are active. As we will see, the recent political upheaval in Egypt makes few changes to a dynamic long in the making. I will then discuss attempts made by different actors in the Egyptian political system to tackle the issue of sectarian relations. Finally, I will analyze the role played by foreign actors in recent policy changes regarding this issue, and weigh in on the possible drawbacks of these foreign influences.

### Parallel Religious Revivals

The current climate of sectarian tension cannot be understood without looking at a broader historical context marked by parallel Coptic and

Islamic revivals. Both were triggered by the colonial encounter, took shape in the late nineteenth century and accelerated after the defeat by Israel in 1967. This shared genealogy explains the homology of both revivals. As Martin points out, even though "the content of [both the Coptic and Muslim] renewal is different [...]. In both cases we find a rejection of a 'westernized modernity', of its ideas and its praxis, while the intention is ad fontes, the return to the authenticity of one's own sources" (1997). A concrete example of this homology can be found in the strikingly similar structure of the discourses of Coptic and Muslim preachers as noted by Radi (1997).

## The Islamic Revival

### Islam Never Really Went Away

Vatikiotis (1991) argues that, from its very inception, the Egyptian national movement had a strong Islamic dimension. At the end of the nineteenth century, resistance to European influence in general, and British tutelage in particular, was mostly framed in term of pan-Islamic solidarity and undergirded by allegiance to the Sublime Porte. But at the beginning of the twentieth century, the inability of the Ottoman Empire to "assist its non-Turkish Muslim subjects in their opposition to European rule" became obvious. He refers here to the take over of Morocco by France and Libya by Italy. This, he argues "prompted the idea of territorial [meaning Egyptian] nationalism" (ibid.: 214). This idea imposed itself even more easily given that, since Mohamed Ali's rule, Egypt was de facto an independently run administrative unit of the empire.

Even though a secular national movement in the 1920s and 1930s emerged, "this secularism was not marked by an abandonment of the Islamic faith" (ibid.: 218), and this period was one of ongoing debate regarding the relationship of religion and politics. In fact, the secularists were labeled as such because they were fighting first the influence of King Fouad then King Farouk, who both used religion to boost their own legitimacy and further their political aims (ibid. 1991; see also Aclimandos 2001). It was not, therefore, a reflection of their own lack of religiosity per se but rather their resistance to the use of religion as tool by the ruling monarch. Overall, this period of Egyptian history is often remembered by today's Egyptian secularists as a golden age, characterized by a unified (meaning non-sectarian) national movement. However, when viewed in a wider historical perspective, non-sectarianism can be seen as more of an

exception than the rule when it comes to the relationship of religion and in politics in Egypt.

Additionally, the success of the secular party Wafd in its struggle to wrest Egypt's independence from the British did not necessarily mean that the Egyptian masses recognized themselves in its secularism. This partially explains why the Wafd struggled to rule the country once the constitutional monarchy was established. Partly due to royal hindrance, the party of Saad Zaghlul alienated many, who went on to join the ranks of other organizations including the Muslim Brotherhood. By the time of the 1952 revolution, the movement funded by Hassan El-Banna was enjoying the largest popular support of any other political organization in Egypt. In fact, without its tacit approval, the revolution/coup of the Free Officers could not have taken place (Aclimandos 2002). But the success, until today, of the Muslim Brotherhood as an organization reflects, rather than explains, the rise of the Islamic idiom in Egyptian society.

*The Failure of Arab Socialism*

The Arab socialist nationalism promoted by Gamal Abdel Nasser after 1958 was not particularly religious in nature. During his successor's presidency, however, the Islamic dimension of Egyptian identity was more directly promoted, as Anwar Al Sadat allied himself with Islamist-leaning elites to bolster his power and undermine the still influential Nasserites. El-Khawaga sums up the changing role of Islam as a frame of reference during the post-Nasser period when she writes: "The media's insistence on the Islamic identity of Egypt grew stronger, first to supplant the symbols of the Egyptian left (1972–1976), then to compensate for Egypt leaving the Arab League following the signing of the Camp David Accords with Israel and then again to take the reislamisation slogan away from the Muslim Brotherhood or the [radical] Islamist groups (1978–1990)" (1993).

The failures of the now authoritarian Egyptian State were not limited to the military arena. Sadat's attempt at liberalizing the Egyptian economy, by reducing subsidies and privatizing government services, led to the country's failure to provide basic services to vast segments of the population. Sadat also failed dismally at curbing corruption. The Islamic opposition, on the other hand, showed itself as an honest and viable alternative to the secular and inefficient government. In the aftermath of the 1992 earthquake, as the authorities struggled to respond to the chaos, a multitude of Islamic charities coordinated by the Muslim Brotherhood sprang into action and quickly delivered food and shelter to thousands affected (Campagna 1996).

This display of efficiency helped build the credentials of the Islamic opposition as a whole.

The decline of popular support to the more radical Islamist groups in the late 90s mentioned earlier did not slow down the Islamic revival, far from it. The Muslim Brotherhood, who had publicly denounced the attack upon tourists in Luxor in 1997 and other similar violent incidents in the 80s and 90s, emerged as a moderately Islamic alternative to the not so moderate authoritarianism of Egypt's official government. In fact, because of the secular opposition's collapse in the 1960s and 1970s, in part because of Nasser's ideological intransigence, today the Brotherhood is, in terms of popular support, the only credible organized opposition in the country.

*Islamization From the Top and the Bottom*

The process of nationalization of Islam and of Islamization of the State accelerated after the resounding victory of Israel over the Arab armies in 1967. With that defeat, the dominant Arab nationalist narrative championed by Nasser instantly lost credibility, leaving Egypt in an ideological crisis. Sadat's economic policy of *infitah* consecrated the failure of Arab socialism as an ideology, leaving for most Egyptians the country's Muslim identity as one of the few enduring ideas to hang on to and rally around.

This Islamic identification was furthered by Sadat's tacit political alliance with the Islamists (Kepel 1984) as well as his policy of economic liberalization, which had a significant impact on the Egyptian landscape; it opened the gate to mass production and consumption of religious commodities which quickly saturated the physical environment of Egypt (Starrett 1995), just as the Islamic discourse had saturated the cognitive environment. With time, economic liberalization led to what has been called Islamic consumerism (Haenni 2008). After Sadat's assassination in 1981, Mubarak's efforts to nationalize Islam paradoxically further bolstered its pregnancy in Egyptian society. Indeed as Starrett suggests "the Egyptian government's […] efforts to use religious education in the public school system as part of a program to combat religious 'extremism' merely increase[ed] the emphasis on Islam in Egyptian culture" (1991).

The revival was also furthered by many Islamic moral entrepreneurs, ranging from the anonymous individual who posted stickers in Cairo's subway inviting Egyptian women to don the Islamic headscarf, to clean shaven and suit-wearing Islamic televangelists such as Amr Khaled, whose modern preaching style appeals to an Egyptian upper class that previously did not recognize itself in the more traditional Azharite clerics (Haenni

2002). It must be noted, though, that the physical and discursive omnipres-
ence of Islam does not mean that all agree on a specific Islamic path. As
Radi suggests, the shared use of the Islamic reference frame by a variety
of Egyptian actors does not mean that they share an understanding of the
content of that frame (1995). More likely, it is the very plasticity of the
Islamic vocabulary that explains its wide appeal.

## The Coptic Revival

During the same period that saw Islam slowly increase in visibility in
Egyptian society, the Coptic community underwent profound changes as
well. These were marked by the Coptic Church's rise to preeminence, a
process usually referred to as the 'Coptic revival' or 'Coptic awakening'.
Even though Sedra has shown that the dominant historical narrative of
the awakening overemphasizes his role (2007), Coptic Pope Cyril IV is
often credited with being its initiator, hence his nickname *Abu Al-Ilsah*
(the father of reform). Contrary to popular belief, the ongoing process was
not so much an answer to the Islamic revival (El-Khawaga 1993) as a fun-
damentally internal process. Like its Islamic counterpart, it was triggered
by the colonial encounter and, more particularly in the Coptic case, the
concomitant arrival of foreign missions in Egypt (Sedra 2004).

   El-Khawaga showed that new generations of educated professionals came
to replace the old untrained clergy and began to transform the Church from
within (1993). While the dominant Church-centered 'awakening' narrative
reflects otherwise, Sedra highlights the role of laymen in forging an educated
Coptic community (2007). What is certain is that, as they rose through the
ranks of the Church, educated Copts profoundly transformed the institution.
The trajectory of the current Pope, Shenouda III, is a perfect example of
this trend. Under this new, educated leadership the Church became what
it is today, a well run, rich, centralized, and efficient organization. But this
transformation did not stop at the institutional level: the relationship of
the Church to the political realm changed as well. The "more educated and
politicized" leadership saw its role as not only one of "religious representa-
tive of the Copts but was also trying to act as their political representative"
(Farah 1986). For El-Khawaga this role of political representation acquired
even greater importance when Sadat undertook the islamization of the
national narrative, sidelining the Copts in the process (1993). Here again
Shenouda's initial vocal attitude towards Sadat's policies was characteristic
of the new breed of clergy brought about by the revival.

The transformation of the Church was not limited to its leadership. As the latter became savvier, it worked at expanding the outreach of the institution to its flock. The evolution of the role of the Coptic Orthodox Church Bishopric of Youth is an excellent illustration of this phenomenon. Initially in charge of teaching the Orthodox doctrine to the Coptic youth through a network of Sunday schools, it has become over time a vast network of exclusively Christian socialization spaces targeting Coptic youth. The activities it offers range from after school programs to Bible study to soccer leagues, all exclusively Coptic in practice if not in name. The growth of the Church did not stop there. The Bishopric of Social Services centralized part of the outreach to the less fortunate among the Copts. As the offer of social service expanded, it also provided opportunities of continued involvement for young Coptic adults who had 'graduated' from the youth programs, keeping them involved in Church-related activities. This opportunity to spend more time within their own community was particularly appealing to Copts at a time when society at large was becoming saturated with an Islamic discourse which they perceived as alienating. New generations of Copts grew up spending more and more time in exclusively Coptic spaces and away from more religiously mixed settings.

Behind its mere organizational aspects the revival has had, as was intended (Sedra 2007; El-Khawaga 1993), a profound impact on Coptic subjectivity. As the Church grew stronger, so did Copts' sense of pride in their Church and heritage, and also in their 'Copticness'. As Sedra shows, starting in the 1970's, Egypt witnessed the emergence of an "explicitly sectarian political discourse among groups of middle-class Copts and the related spread of an ethnic consciousness through the Coptic community" (1999). This ethnic consciousness and the renewed feeling of Coptic pride born of the revival has given birth, in segments of the Coptic community, to what can be described as a form of Coptic quasi-nationalism. This discourse insists, for example, that Copts are the "true sons of the pharaohs", implicitly relegating the Egyptian Muslims to being mere descendants of inferior, non-indigenous Arab invaders (Delhaye 2007). This type of quasi-nationalist discourse is mainly visible abroad, where a more open and freer environment allows Coptic activist organizations in the diaspora to operate without fear of government harassment. Even though only a minority of Copts abroad openly sympathize with this discourse, the silence of the diasporic Coptic clergy allows it to blossom unchallenged in the host society public space. And while it is seldom publicly heard in Egypt, there is little doubt that this discourse also exists there and that supporters of such an understanding

of Coptic identity provide diasporic organizations with information that serve their exclusionist agenda.

In 1986, Nadia Ramsis Farah wrote that "[t]he disaffected Copts turned to religion in the same way their Muslim peers did. However heightened religiosity within the Coptic community did not produce the formation of politically militant movements independent from the Church [...]. Organized militancy was confined to a section of the Coptic Church itself" (1986). Recent events seem to have proved her wrong. Diaspora groups have definitely adopted a militant tone, and the renewed sense of Coptic pride, combined with a broader upsurge of political activity in Egypt in the past 10 years, has given rise to spontaneous public displays of Coptic anger outside of the framework of the Church. This latter phenomenon is particularly striking, as Coptic street protests were largely unheard of until very recently. (Guindy 2004).

The first sizable occurrence took place in 2001, after *Al-Nabaa*, a tabloid newspaper, published blurred screen copies of a video of a defrocked monk having sex with different women. In an unprecedented public display of collective anger, Copts took to the streets and threw rocks at the police in front of the Patriarchate in Cairo. In November 2004, when the wife of a Coptic priest ran away with her Muslim lover, again the Coptic youth started a protest that forced an overwhelmed Pope to retreat to a monastery. In yet another interesting parallel with Muslim rioters, during these protests, Copts paraded religious symbols such as crosses and icons while singing religious songs illustrating the centrality of the religion in Coptic identity. Since then, similar if smaller, public displays of discontent by Copts have taken place on a regular basis, usually triggered by conversion issues.

### A Growing Alienation Between the Two Communities

Both the violence against Copts and their public displays of dissatisfaction with what they see as attacks on their religion are symptoms of a deeper and, until recently, mostly silent malaise that punctual precipitants and a somehow more open political environment have rendered visible. This malaise is the product of a growing isolation of the two communities that increasingly live, work or study side by side but with limited contact and knowledge of each other.

As mentioned earlier, the failure of Arab socialism as an economic system and ideology has led to the popular embrace of the Islamic ethos by Muslims and of the Coptic ethos by Christians. More importantly

there are signs that younger Copts and Muslims have, compared to their parents' and grand-parents' generations, more limited social interaction, and therefore know little about each other. This is in part due to the Copts turning inward. El-Khawaga has described in detail the emergence of what she refers to as a "closed communitarian space" (1993). My own fieldwork at the Coptic Patriarchate in Cairo suggests a tendency to more exclusively Coptic socialization especially among the younger generation. Recent ethnographic studies conducted on Coptic families and communities in different Cairo neighborhoods also identify this trend. Vivier, for example, describes how the multitudes of activities available (soccer, Bible study, school tutoring…) in an urban Cairene parish led Coptic children, teenagers and young adults to socialize mostly among themselves (2000). Working in a different and less privileged neighborhood, Oram points out that "for these new generations the Coptic Church has become an important new site for bringing together Copts for service, education and recreation. While it is still important for this new generation to maintain certain kinds of basic alliances in their neighborhood, their most important ones are now formed in the context of the church" (2004). By emphasizing religious belonging the two revivals have alienated both communities from each other. Keeping to themselves, both Copts and Muslims know little about each other and this proves a breeding ground for stereotypes and intolerance. Numerically inferior, Copts always end up the victims of the rising tension between the two communities.

The increasing insulation of the two communities from each other is furthered by the emergence of exclusively Muslim and Coptic mediascapes. As Elsässer points out, for years "the lack of choice forced Egyptian Muslims and Copts to consume the same media, which in turn guaranteed them sharing to some extent the same horizon—including their perception of the Coptic question" (2010). The government exerted tight control on mass media, in particular on television. Because of self-censorship, but also because of their own secular leanings, producers of series for the state television did not portray religion as a source of morality and were silent regarding the Islamist movement (Abu-Lughod 1993). But in the past 15 years things have dramatically changed. The development of satellite television opened up a new media landscape outside the control of the Egyptian State. This had two important effects. First, among the channels available were Islamic ones that catered to audiences whose worldview was already shaped by religion. That segment of the viewership now had access to basically communitarian media that reflected an understanding of the world shaped by Islamic values and from which Copts were absent

or portrayed as "others". Second and more importantly, because Copts are present almost exclusively in Egypt, pan-Arab satellite channels have few incentives to portray Copts or sectarian issues involving them in the fictions they broadcast, for most non-Egyptians could relate only slightly, if at all, to them . Overall this means that Copts disappeared from the screens of many Egyptians, who had switched to satellite television because of the paucity of state run media.

If the disappearance of Copts from the media landscape of many Egyptians, because of their switch from Egypt-based state controlled media to Gulf-based media, was not a conscious, voluntary, and organized phenomenon for the most part, the emergence of Coptic media was. Churches and monasteries became distribution venues for all kinds of Copt-related books and pamphlets. With the evolution of technology the offer quickly came to encompass "cassettes of liturgical chants, of sermons or talks, and now also videos and posters" (Martin 1997). And in reaction to the decreased presence of Copts in "mainstream" satellite programming, recently we have seen the emergence of a Coptic film industry (Doss 2004). Another step was reached in 2005 when the Coptic Church started its own satellite television Channel *Aghapy TV*. The channel was partly an answer to previously created Arabic-speaking non-Orthodox Christian satellite channels such as *SAT7* and *Al-Hayat* that targeted, among others, Egyptian Copts.

### The Politics of Sectarian Relations in Egypt

To fully understand the politics of Muslim-Christian relations in Egypt, one must also look at the evolution of Egyptian nationalist discourses. The nationalist ideology, the idea that the people living in a given territory, usually that of a state, form a nation with a common past and a shared culture, is a rather recent phenomenon in human history. Usually considered to have taken shape on a global scale in the mid-nineteenth century, it played a decisive role in the formation of anti-colonial movements. If the progress of multiculturalism has made the exclusivist nationalist ideology somehow less legitimate, especially in the west, the 'one nation, one state' motto remains very much influential everywhere, including in the Middle East.

At the core of each nationalism lies an ethno-national narrative, defined as a set of founding myths and official discourses on the nation-state, its unity, its history, its identity, its characteristics, its destiny. The ability of political elites to set forth such a narrative is one of the ways through

which nation-states' rulers or would-be rulers legitimate their mandate. This is congruent with Gellner's conception of nationalism as "a theory of political legitimacy, which requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones and in particular, that ethnic boundaries within a given state—a contingency already formally excluded by the principle in its general formulation—should not separate the power-holders from the rest" (Gellner 1983: 1). In the case of Mubarak's Egypt, the control of the ethno-national narrative was of particular importance because his government lacked other commonly recognized sources of legitimacy. It not only had less than stellar democratic credentials, but the roll back of the social policies that had characterized the early period of independence also stymied the legitimacy to be gained from the ability to redistribute wealth.

*The Staging of National Unity*

Until the 1990s the official stance had been to deny the very existence of any sectarian tension. Problems, when they occurred, were often blamed on foreign powers meddling in Egyptian affairs or trying to undermine the progress of the country. The ethno-national narrative put forward by authorities claims that Muslims and Christians are, both in law and in reality, equal citizens of the benevolent Egyptian State. This discourse can be referred to as the *national unity* narrative or the *national fabric* narrative to use one of the most common metaphors (see for example Khusak 1999). It has been present in the Egyptian public sphere since the rise of the Egyptian nationalist movement in the late nineteenth–early twentieth century and has been dominant since the rise of secular nationalist movement in the 1920s. It argues that Muslims and Christians are, both in law and in reality, equal citizens of the Egyptian State. When problems between Copts and Muslims occur, their magnitude is downplayed: they are characterized as exceptional, their religious nature questioned or denied, and/or they are attributed to the malicious work of fundamentalist elements or foreign powers. After the events of El-Kosheh mentioned earlier, secular Egyptian intellectuals typically wrote numerous articles in that spirit in the Egyptian press. Even before the killings of El-Kosheh, the denial of even the possibility of a problem was so pervasive that it was openly challenged by Egyptian journalists who asked the government for more transparency (e.g. Huwaydi 1998).

To reinforce the image of an idyllic relationship between the religious communities, the government regularly organizes public displays of 'national unity'. Officials invite the religious leader of both religions, the

Sheikh of Al-Azhar and the Coptic Pope, to well publicized events where they ostentatiously demonstrate their friendship and respect for each other. During major Christian religious holidays like Christmas and Easter, government officials sit prominently in the front row of the Coptic Cathedral in Cairo during mass. During the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, Christian figures will attend official *iftars*, and the Church itself will organize well publicized charity banquets. The idea behind all this ostentatious display of brotherly love is of course to send the message that Copts are an integral part of the Egyptian citizenry. Yet as one author rightly puts it, "the very fact that this is stated so insistently shows that a problem does exist" (van Niespen tot Sevenaer 1997).

## The Coptic Pope is Aligned with the Mubarak Government

The contemporary position of the Coptic Church can be summarized by that of its potent Pope, Shenouda III, who has been at the head of the institution since 1971 and has, throughout his reign, reinforced the power of the papacy over the community. Placed under house arrest by Sadat in 1981 for openly criticizing his policy of Islamization of the country, embodied by the enshrining of the Shari'a law in Article 2 of the Egyptian Constitution, the patriarch was released by Mubarak in 1985. From then on, he was highly supportive of the Mubarak regime, endorsing him during several of his presidential bids. This non-confrontational attitude allowed the Pope to gain significant access to the executive and gave him leeway to approach officials about issues dear to the Church.[2] In May 2008, the Egyptian daily *Al-Masry Al-Youm* announced that Pope Shenouda and the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church had secured from the government the narrowing of the grounds for divorce for Christians—basically codifying into the law of the land the conservative dogma he had long been advocating as a spiritual leader (Al-Khatib 2008). In the past, the Pope has also sought to gain censorship power on movies and books dealing with Christianity equivalent to that of Al-Azhar on material deemed related to Islam. This relationship of unconditional support in exchange for political gains has been described has a sort of neo-millet system (Rowe 2007; Sedra 1999). This privileged access to the executive and policy initiative, gained from his loyalty, helps explain the Pope's stubborn and very public endorsement

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[2] On the evolution of the relationship between the Coptic Church and the Egyptian executive see Tadros 2009.

of Mubarak during the events that led to his recent stepping down from the presidency.

### The Muslim Brotherhood and the National Unity Narrative

As mentioned earlier, the Muslim Brotherhood, although officially banned, is a major player in the Egyptian political system. Even though radical groups have targeted Copts during the 70s and 80s, overall the organization has not been publicly hostile to Copts, especially under the leadership of former Brotherhood supreme guide Mustafa Mashhour. As part of its strategy of normalization and entry into the political mainstream, the Brotherhood has embraced the national unity narrative, a litmus test of sorts of its commitment to democratic ideals. In the 2000 election cycle the Brotherhood tried to have a Copt run on its electoral lists. On several occasions also, its leaders have spoken in favor of freedom of religion. After a sectarian flare up that claimed the life of one Copt, in the town of Odaysat in 2006, Essam Erian, a top member of the Brotherhood, told reporters, for example, that "People should be able to worship freely". He then went on to criticize the government for having Copts "wait endlessly for [church building] licenses to be issued" (quoted in Williams 2006). Finally, during a recent victory party organized at the Brotherhood headquarters to celebrate Mubarak's departure, a Coptic priest was ostensibly visible on stage.[3] This type of public display of sectarian correctness and support for Coptic claims targets two audiences, one domestic and one international, and sends to both the message that the Brotherhood is a 'normal' and moderate political organization and should therefore be treated as such (Legeay 2004).

### The End of a Taboo and the Nuancing of the National Unity Narrative

For many years, sectarian issues were among the few red lines that journalists should not cross if they wanted their articles to make it past the scissors of the Egyptian government censors (*Middle East Times* 2005). As discussed earlier, plagued by corruption and inefficiencies, the authorities could draw little legitimacy from its democratic credentials (or lack thereof) or from its ability to redistribute wealth, and the taboo surrounding sectarian tensions kept alive the idea that at least it could maintain social peace and order. Yet, since the late 1990s, there has been a loosening at first and

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[3]  I wish to thank Samer Shehata for sharing this information with me.

then a clear collapse on the unofficial ban on the topic in the media. The depiction of Muslim-Christian relations is no longer idyllic and has, as we will see, recently evolved so as to recognize, albeit minimizing, existing problems. In general, coverage of Coptic issues has exploded. This has not gone unnoticed by Copts, and in 2007 the English edition of Coptic newspaper *Al-Watany* started running a column discussing the coverage of Coptic issues in the Egyptian press (Al-Faris 2006).

*Multiple Factors*

The crumbling of the long lasting taboo was the product of a combination of more profound changes. First, the end of the 1990s was marked by the withering of the violent radical Islamist threat and the slow entry (with ups and downs) of the Muslim Brotherhood into the mainstream. As attacks subsided, the authorities had to unclench their fist, partly because they could not justify, both domestically and internationally, the lack of liberty by invoking their fight against a vanishing radical Islamist threat. Also important was the increasing pressure by the United States including the surprisingly principled, if not the most subtly executed, Bush administration's push for democracy in the Middle East. Furthermore, the rise of satellite channels and then of the internet, which contributed to the emergence of separate Muslim and Coptic mediascapes, also greatly eased the circulation of information regarding sectarian relations both within and without Egypt. Outside the influence of the state, foreign-based channels do not have to fear the repercussions that local television and print media face. This and the slow democratization of internet access, through the opening of a large number of cyber cafés throughout the country, made it harder for the government to control the flow of information and to prevent news of sectarian incidents from reaching the wider population. Additionally, there were changes in the domestic print media environment. In the past ten years or so, and in an effort to bolster its democratic credentials, the Egyptian authorities have allowed the emergence of an independent, if not yet totally free, press. Of particular significance was the licensing and creation, in 2004, of the privately owned and run daily newspaper *Al-Masry Al-Youm*. Even though large segments of the printing press in Egypt remain under state control, the entry of new players, in particular of *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, has had a positive impact on news coverage. On the matter, Hazem Abdel Rahman, managing editor of the state-controlled powerhouse newspaper *Al-Ahram*, candidly declared that "The emergence of the private and independent press in the last four to five years has raised

the limits of the press freedom which we are practicing in the Egyptian press" (quoted in Cooper 2008).

*Greater Visibility*

The fall of the taboo regarding the existence of sectarian tensions in Egypt had a positive impact, because it triggered some debate among journalists and intellectuals regarding the real state of sectarian relations in Egypt. More generally, it also allowed greater visibility to Coptic issues in the public sphere, and state run media played their role in this. On May 30th 2002, the daily newspaper *El-Gumhuriya*, the government's mouthpiece, published a well- publicized two full-page interview with Coptic Pope Shenouda. The journalistic powerhouse *Al-Ahram* has also recently started to publish a weekly column by Pope Shenouda (Al-Faris 2006). But, more importantly, Copts and the issue of sectarian relations have started to appear in television and in movies.

This greater visibility of Christians in popular culture is not always welcome by Copts who sometimes have issues with what is depicted and how. One such occurrence took place during the holy Muslim month of Ramadan 2000 when state television aired a series entitled *Awan Al-Ward* that depicted the family life of a mixed couple and the struggle and dilemma of a Christian mother raising her daughter as Muslim. More recently, even though it was written and directed by Christians, the release in 2004 of the autobiographic movie *Bahibb Es-Sinema* also triggered angry responses by Copts who had issues with the portrayal of a bigoted Christian father preventing his son from watching the movies he loved.[4]

In 2008, *Hassan and Morqos*, a film starring the famous Egyptian humorist Adel Imam and Egyptian born Hollywood star Omar Sharif addressed the issue openly. It told the story of the friendship of two unlikely neighbours, an imam and a priest who, in order to escape harassment by extremists of their respective religions, had to pretend to be of the other faith. Symptomatic of the new discourse on sectarian relations, the movie showed the two as getting along regardless of religion, while acknowledging problems but blaming them on "extremists" on both sides. Since they are the ones facing the discrimination and bearing the brunt of the attacks when they occur, most Copts take issue with the idea of sharing the blame for sectarian tensions.

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[4] On this controversy see Mehrez, 2008, p. 188.

*Opening Pandora's Box*

The relaxed censorship on Coptic related topics also had some less welcome consequences. As Elsässer suggests, "[d]isplaying matters of religious tension between Muslims and Copts in a sensationalist manner is obviously perceived as a good selling strategy by a considerable segment of the press" (2010). I would even argue that any issue dealing with Christianity can be turned into sales. A particularly creative episode of this trend occurred on December 16, 2005, when the once reputable magazine *Rose Al-Yusef* conflated in a single article two sales-boosting topics: modesty and Christian doctrine. The front page of the magazine read: "The Faculty of Theology declares that Jesus Christ was not crucified naked". This example of the commercial exploitation of minority religious issues by the press is rather benign, yet it is infuriating for many Copts. More worrying is the habit of the weekly tabloid press of running much more destructive stories that reinforce stereotypes and perpetuate prejudices against Copts (Elsässer 2010). The sensationalist coverage of minority religious issues sometimes triggers outrage from both Christians and Muslims. In 2004 for example, rumors that Wafaa Constantine, a priest's wife, had converted to Islam, led to a protest by Coptic youth in front of the Patriarchate in Cairo. Weeks later, Muslims protested when the woman was returned, probably against her will, to the custody of the Church. The Egyptian press covered the affair assiduously, with extensive use of alarmist titles invoking the fear of sectarianism, or even civil war, effectively turning what was probably a mere conjugal issue into a national media circus (Klaus 2005).

*A Series of Government Gestures*

It is clear that the Egyptian government has played a role in the Islamization of society yet it is hard to argue, as some Coptic activists do, that the authorities have "Islamist" tendencies. In fact except for a brief period under Sadat, the State has spent most of the past 50 plus years going after its Islamist opposition. On the other hand, in order to appease a majority and preserve the little legitimacy it had, the State has for many years not done much to address real issues pertaining to the Copts.

Since the mid-1990s though, there has been a noticeable change, marked by ostentatious goodwill, in the attitude of the government towards Coptic claims. The administrative hurdles to build and repair churches are a case in point. This had been a long lasting point of contention between the authorities and the Church. In 1998, the burdensome *Humayun* decrees, legislations dating from the Ottoman era, were quietly amended so that

presidential approval was no longer required to issue repair permits to non-Muslim places of worship. Now delegated to governors, also a way of conveniently deflecting future criticism to lower ranking officials, repair permits have started to be issued more liberally (Rowe 2007). In 2005, the process was overhauled again, making basic repairs subject only to written notification to the local authorities. The new decree also extended to governors the power to grant permits for expanding and rebuilding existing churches and mandated that permit application be examined within 30 days and that refusal be formally justified (U.S. Department of State 2008).

Police response to sectarian flare-ups has also dramatically changed. As soon as any sign of sectarian conflict emerges, sometimes even before any violence has been reported at all, police forces are deployed to the area. The swiftness and force of the crackdown by the authorities against the Muslim rioters in the port city of Alexandria in 2005 are in that regard to be contrasted with the State's delayed reaction five years earlier to the violent events in the southern village of El-Kosheh. In Alexandria, a much more populous city, there were only 3 victims, all Muslims, and they were killed by the police; in El-Kosheh 20 of the 21 killed were Copts. Even judicial responses to sectarian incidents have started to change. In January 2011, a death sentence was handed down by an Egyptian court to one of the Muslim perpetrators of the deadly drive-by shooting at a church, a year earlier, in the southern city of Nag Hamadi.

Another government gesture came in December 2002, when President Mubarak announced that January 7th, the day Copts, who follow the Julian calendar, celebrate Christmas, was to become a national holiday. Also, in June 2003, the Shura Council, the Egyptian legislature's higher chamber, approved the creation of the Egyptian Council on Human Rights (ECHR) in charge of investigating charges of human right abuses, including claims made by Copts. Prominent Egyptian Christian and Former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali was quickly named president of the newly created entity. The greater Coptic presence in state controlled media and the nomination in 2006 of the first Coptic governor in 30 years are other signs that the authorities are trying to address some of the long standing claims of Copts.

## Foreign Influences

### Catering to a Foreign Audience

There is no doubt that, by partly relieving the Egyptian government from the constant need to display its "good Muslimness", the withering of the radical Islamist threat, starting in the mid 90's, has given some leeway to

the authorities to address Coptic grievances. But even mainstreamed, the Muslim Brotherhood remains the strongest opposition and still challenges the Mubarak regime in the name of Islam in a country that is 95 percent Muslim. So why did the government move beyond the existing status quo? I agree with Mehrez when she suggests that part of the answer lies beyond the borders of Egypt. When dealing with the issue of sectarian tension, she describes the Egyptian government attitude as a difficult balancing act that tries to "cultivate a dual image of secularism (for global consumption) and religious nationalism (for the local one)" (2008). Egypt is publicly defensive of its sovereignty, but in today's globalized economy, it has to be mindful of its foreign image, in particular in western countries. Indeed, tourism, mostly from western countries, is a prime source of foreign currencies for the country (Mansour 2002). Egypt is also the recipient of large amounts of foreign aid, again from mostly western and majority Christian countries (Moisseron and Delhaye 2004), whose public opinion tends to be supportive of Christian minorities, especially since 9/11.

### The U.S.—Official Ally and Media Scapegoat

The U.S. is the largest foreign donor to Egypt with a yearly military and civil aid package averaging 2 billion dollars over the past decade (Mark 2005). This aid is conditioned mainly on Egypt maintaining peace with Israel. Only once has the U.S. publicly threatened to use the aid package to gain leverage in another issue: in 2002 for the liberation of Saad Eddin Ibrahim, a prominent Egyptian democracy and human rights advocate. The aid, and the special relationship between Egypt and the United States that partially stems from it, nevertheless allows the U.S. to voice its concerns and to be listened to. The regular and very public calls by some congressmen to cancel or to put conditionalities on Egypt's generous earmarks also give greater credence to U.S. diplomats' quieter demands.

U.S. pressures on Egypt regarding Coptic issues have also increased towards the end of the 1990s because of a campaign that led to the passing in 1998 of the International Religious Freedom Act or IRFA (U.S. Congress 1998). Born of an initiative taken by a few well-connected activists to address Christian persecution abroad, the IRFA only came into being because of a very domestic partisan dynamic that had nothing to do with Egypt.[5] As a result of this campaign, between 1997 and 2001, a number of American

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[5]  On the act itself, see Decherf 2001. On the politics surrounding the passing of the act, see Delhaye 2009, pp. 99–102.

politicians and delegations visited the country and inquired about the situation of the Copts. These visits spurred strong negative reactions in Egypt. Many politicians and intellectuals, including Coptic ones, boycotted the American delegations and denounced the visits as unwelcome meddling in Egyptian domestic affairs. But the process and the debate it triggered helped bring down the taboo that surrounded sectarian relations and put the issue on the media's agenda.

The IRFA formally made the promotion of religious freedom abroad a priority of U.S. foreign policy and created a formal framework within which to address the issue. In the following years, U.S. officials started raising the issue more prominently with their Egyptian counterparts, who were not always pleased with the increased scrutiny.[6] Yet the Egyptian authorities seem to listen, as there are hints that suggest some of the measures taken in recent years to address Coptic claims were not only domestically driven. For example, for Copts Easter is a more important religious holiday than Christmas, yet it was the latter, a much more universally celebrated holiday in the west, that was made a national holiday by Mubarak in 2002. The naming of Boutros Boutros Ghali as the head of ECHR is another example. A former U.N. secretary General and a Copt, he has his permanent residence in Paris, not Cairo where the Council meets. This also suggests that his nomination was a symbolic move intended to give foreign credibility to the ECHR and to increase the visibility of the Coptic community to foreign observers.

### *The Role of Coptic Activists in the Diaspora*

As mentioned earlier, since his release from house arrest in 1985 by Mubarak, Pope Shenouda III has adopted a conciliatory approach in his dealing with the government. Not all Copts agree with this approach though, and activist organizations abroad, mainly in the United States, have adopted a much more critical tone. Coptic activism is not a new phenomenon. The first documented occurrences date back to the late 70s (Abdelnour 1993). However it was the demoting of Pope Shenouda in 1981 and his placement under house arrest by Sadat that triggered the first significant mobilization from diaspora Copts, with the clergy abroad throwing its weight and influence behind the call to free the Patriarch. For 10 years after the Pope's release, things remained mostly quiet. Even though a handful of Coptic

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[6] Interview with U.S. diplomats who requested anonymity, carried out in Cairo on June 16th 2003.

activists were still trying to mobilize, nobody really listened. The U.S. media, in particular, were not interested.

Things changed significantly in the mid-1990s due to the movement that led to the passing of the IRFA. Even though, as mentioned earlier, originally it had nothing to do with Egypt, "Coptic persecution" quickly became a handy illustration of the push for political action. Joseph Assad, a Copt, had recently joined the staff of *Freedom House*, an organization that, at the time, was at the forefront of the religious freedom initiative. The entry of the lobbying and activist organization *U.S. Copts*, as a new player on the Coptic activism scene, also played a role. Based in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area, in close proximity to decision makers, *U.S. Copts* was created by Michael Meunier, a politically and technologically savvy young Copt, who helped convince some U.S. politicians to champion the Coptic cause while creating an internet-based Coptic information network to collect and spread information and calls for action.

Coptic activism within the diaspora is diverse, with different organizations and individuals competing for the legitimate representation of Coptic claims and the attention of the host society's political institutions. Following Dufoix, it can be described as an exopolity (2002). What most activists share, though, is a specific diagnosis of the situation of the Copts in Egypt. They understand it as "persecution" at the hands of an oppressing Muslim majority. Their discourse is also characterized by a victimo-nationalist structure. I suggest that this type of narrative is not unique to Coptic activists but is shared with other U.S. based diasporic activist groups like, among others, Armenian nationalists and Jewish Zionists.

This discourse challenges the national unity narrative and is enmeshed in an understanding of history that sees Copts as the true descendents of the pharaohs and distinguishes them not just religiously but ethnically, culturally and linguistically from their Egyptian Muslim fellow citizens (Delhaye 2007). Once made known in Egypt, these discourses reinforce the alienation of both communities and impair the dialogue needed to find workable solutions and address the problem of Coptic discrimination. Coptic activists abroad, the most vocal of whom are in the U.S., also keep lambasting Egypt's political leadership. If more moderate Coptic activists limit themselves to denouncing the government's inaction, more radical elements suggest that the Egyptian authorities are masterminding a vast anti-Coptic conspiracy.[7] They call for the U.S. to exert pressure on

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[7] For a similar dilemma among Christian Palestinians in Bethlehem, see Kårtveit, in this volume.

the country and advocate for the withholding of U.S. foreign assistance to Egypt. These calls do not fare well in a country whose economic situation is far from perfect. The diagnosis of the Coptic situation put forward by the more radical elements is often quite dramatic, and to achieve their goal they are keen on using moving, yet often inaccurate, stories such as that of "the forced conversion and marriage of Coptic girls" (Delhaye 2008).

*Unholy Alliances?*

Because it was driven by partisan politics more than by the issue itself, interest in the Coptic cause quickly subsided in the U.S. after the IRFA passed. But in the process, the Coptic cause had found new advocates within the U.S. political system, congressmen and senators, who remained committed.[8] Using the clout given to them by their office, they regularly release statements and hold formal or informal hearings on issues pertaining to the situation of the Copts in Egypt. Thus two sympathizers, Wolf and Brownback, who both belong to the Human Right Caucus, co-hosted an informal hearing in Congress during the Second Coptic Conference, a gathering of Coptic activists from around the globe that took place in Washington D.C. in 2005. These hearings and the statements released by congressmen do not represent the official position of the United States on the issue and are fairly inconsequential in the U.S. In fact, they received very little attention from the American media. Yet in Egypt, they are often portrayed in the press as yet another sign of US "meddling" in Egypt internal affairs under pressure from "misguided" Copts living abroad.

Even more alienating is the embrace of the Coptic cause by a number of American civil society organizations and activists with islamophobic and/or anti-Arab discourses if not agendas, most of them with pronounced Zionist sympathies. In 2004, when Adli Abadir, an old time Coptic Egyptian immigrant but a newcomer activist, decided to hold a conference on the situation of the Copts in Zurich, he invited the hawkish, islamophobic, and hardcore Zionist political commentator Daniel Pipes to give the keynote address (Pipes 2004). Self-declared anti-terrorism expert, anti-Arab islamophobe, and former Lebanese phalangist Walid Phares is also a regular defender of the Copts, and so are a number of personalities close to the

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[8] The most potent allies of Coptic activists for the time being are Representatives Frank Wolf, Joe Pitts and Tom Tancredo in the House and Senators Tom Lantos and Sam Brownback in the Senate.

Evangelical and or Christian Zionist movement. These organizations and individuals regularly use Coptic claims of persecution to further their own agenda, sometimes twisting facts in the process. For example, regarding, the Wafaa Constantine affair mentioned earlier, Robert Spencer, co-founder of the Zionist mouthpiece *Front Page Mag* and the islamophobic blog *Jihad Watch* wrote: "Wafaa Constantine Messiha, wife of a Coptic priest in Egypt, was abducted by jihadist Muslims and forced to convert to Islam. The Mubarak regime has done nothing" (Spencer 2004).

The alliances of a few Coptic activists with, and the exploitation of the Coptic cause by, islamophobes and Zionists, do not go unnoticed in Egypt. Even though a very small portion of Coptic immigrants are politically active and many do not subscribe to the persecution narrative put forward by Coptic activists, the Egyptian press will regularly chastise them with blanket statements turning "diaspora Copts" into a convenient media scapegoat for all kind of Egyptian ills (Elsässer 2010). These denunciations do not help foster the image of the Egyptian Christians as loyal Egyptian citizens, and they contribute to furthering the alienation of the two communities.

*Conclusion*

Christians in the Middle East are sometimes paternalistically portrayed as weak or persecuted and therefore in need of protection. In the case of Egypt, one look at the incredible transformation of the Coptic Church in the past 150 years should suffice to disperse the idea of Copts as a powerless minority. During that period the number of Copts more than quintupled, and the Coptic Church transformed itself from a dilapidated institution, whose clergy was barely more literate than its flock, to a thriving and strong Church, capable of enforcing its vision of orthodoxy, providing social services to the poor, and socializing its youth. Once decrepit monasteries now buzz with activity, welcoming new well-educated monks in their cells as well as thousands of pilgrims seeking to deepen their spirituality in large modern facilities. Christianity, just like Islam, has, in the case of the Copts, benefited from the new triumph of religion in the region. But the resurgence of the Church does not mean that all in the community are thriving. While some Copts have benefited from the liberalization of the economy, many have not, and in that they share the fate of many of their Muslim fellow countrymen and women. In addition to their shared issues of poverty, middle class and impoverished Copts also have to deal

with discrimination and a growing sense of alienation from an Islamized Egyptian society.[9]

As the Coptic Church grew stronger, demands for its services surged in an Egyptian society marked by the failure of the State to provide for its citizens, but also by a process of Islamization. Even though the Coptic revival was originally an internally driven process, independent from the process of Islamization of the society at large, over time the latter helped turn the Church into a "communitarian space essentially perceived [by Copts] as a counter space" (El-Khawaga 1993). Producing specifically Coptic cultural goods, this 'counter space' can be assimilated to what Fraser (1992) has called alternative counter publics, where alternative visions of Egyptian identity are articulated. Even though this was not necessarily its intention, Hasan suggests that "the church under Pope Shenouda [...] capitalized on the great value placed on religious identity in fin de siècle Egypt, to outbid the state for the loyalty of its beleaguered Christian citizens" (2003).

Foreign involvement has helped address the symptoms of rising sectarian tensions in Egypt by contributing to the collapse of the taboo that surrounded the issue and shaming the government into action. This is not a new phenomenon, and Rowe has pointed out that historically "the status of Christians under Egyptian law has never changed except in response to external stimuli. [...] So long as Coptic interests remained unimportant to transnational public opinion [...] there were no new innovations" (Rowe 2007). This has created incentives for some disgruntled Copts to seek foreign allies, and Coptic activists in the diaspora have done just that. From the safety of their host country they call for sanctions against Egypt and sometimes embrace an anti-Arab and islamophobic discourse. This foreign scrutiny has forced a Mubarak regime protective of its international image to address long standing issues while denouncing these pressures.

As Iskandar has argued regarding the broader Egyptian democratic experiment, "its success will depend in large part on the public's perception of its domestic character. Thus foreign intervention may derail this delicate process" (2006: 22–23). The same can be said of the Egyptian authorities' attempts at addressing Coptic grievances. This has probably not escaped Pope Shenouda. By adopting a conciliatory stance while mildly denouncing pressure from abroad (he never excommunicated Coptic activists), he seems to try to capitalize on what is known in the social movement literature as

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[9]  Here again, their situation shows similarities with that of Christian Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, see Kårtveit in this volume.

the radical flank effect (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996). Distancing himself from Coptic activists in the diaspora reinforces his image as a patriotic and moderate representative of the Coptic community. Shutting them down would probably reduce his usefulness for an Egyptian government currently keen on showcasing his support. Most likely, it would also alienate segments of the community in Egypt who, as recent Coptic street protests have shown, are more than ever eager to adopt a more vocal approach. As a long sitting Pope and an historical figure of the revival, Shenouda has been able to maintain dissent at a minimum, but his stubborn endorsement of Mubarak, until his departure, has no doubt eroded Copts' confidence in his political leadership. Furthermore, his declining health, the prospects of his upcoming succession, as well as the loss of the Church's privileged access to the Egyptian executive with the departure of Mubarak, all augur a period of great uncertainty for the political representation of Copts in an Egyptian political landscape that itself is highly uncertain.

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CHAPTER FOUR

## LAND, LAW, AND FAMILY PROTECTION IN THE WEST BANK

### Bård Kårtveit

*In early May 2002, Israeli forces withdrew from Bethlehem, ending a brutal five week military siege of the city. For the first time in more than a month, people could leave their houses, walk around, and stock up on food from the shops without fear of being shot by Israeli soldiers. Ameer, a Christian businessman living in the city, was relieved like everyone else. His relief would turn to shock as he learned that, without his knowledge, a man had made legal claims to a large piece of land that belonged to him, and that this claim had already been supported in court. Ameer's land was now the property of another man.*

Since its establishment in 1994, the Palestinian Authority has struggled to build a functioning judicial system and provide adequate legal protections for Palestinians under its rule. One of the problems emerging from this has been a notable increase in land disputes throughout the West Bank. Theft of private property and manipulation of land documents have raised widespread concerns in the West Bank, in particular among Christian landowners in Bethlehem, who have been the main targets of these crimes. For a Christian minority whose presence has been gradually shrinking, this is an issue that has fuelled worries about their future within a Palestinian community. Based on ten months of fieldwork in the West Bank, this chapter will be centred around three main points: First, the issue of land disputes is part of a wider picture, where a weak and dysfunctional legal system under the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the absence of the rule of law have left Palestinians dependent on family and community networks for security and protection. Second, due to their social and demographic characteristics, this leaves Christian Palestinians in a protection gap and a position of structural vulnerability that is further intensified by continued emigration out of Palestine. Finally, in spite of these difficulties, prominent Christians are reluctant to utilize international contacts and to seek external intervention in defence of their own rights and interests. This reflects both en enduring commitment to an ethos of national unity, and a clear priority on the use of 'voice' (Hirschman 1970) among Christian Palestinians.

The issue of land disputes in particular, and law enforcement in general, will be explored in relation to emigration, Christian—Muslim relations in Bethlehem, and the role of the family as a source of social order and protection in the West Bank.

## Christians in Bethlehem

Christian Palestinians include some of the oldest Christian communities in the world, and their presence in Palestine[1] dates back to early Christianity (Pacini 1998). As a resourceful minority, they have been instrumental in the shaping of Palestinian national identity, and have enjoyed a political and cultural influence within Palestinian society that far exceeds their numbers (Aburish 1993; Ayyad 1999). They have a strong presence within the leftwing factions of the PLO and within the Palestinian Authority. By presidential decree, six seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council are reserved for Christians, as is the office of Mayor in ten towns, including Ramallah, Bethlehem and Jericho (Lende 2003; Sabella 2003). Within the Palestinian Authority, they have held at least one cabinet position in each government. In addition, local Christians have a strong presence in health and educational institutions, as well as within the local civil society. However, due to more than a hundred years of large-scale emigration, their number has dwindled, and they now have a total population of approximately 49,000 in the West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem altogether. Some 22,000 live in Bethlehem and the neighbouring towns of Beit Jala and Beit Sahour (Soudah 2006).

Under Ottoman rule, Christians were formally confined to a second class citizens status, and were subject to a number of legal restrictions within the framework of the millet-system (Gonzalez 1992; O'Mahony 2003). Nonetheless, the Christians of Bethlehem established themselves as a resourceful, enterprising elite, thanks to valuable international contacts, trading privileges obtained through the system of Capitulations (Musallam 1992; Arab Educational Institute 1999), control of the local pilgrimage industry, and privileged access to Christian mission schools funded by Western Churches (Sabella 2003: 86). Due to these and other factors, the Christian community in Bethlehem flourished, and prominent Christian families would dominate local commerce and tourism as well as cultural,

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[1] Here I refer to the areas covered by the British Mandate of Palestine, roughly comprising today's Israel, Gaza and the West Bank.

especially educational, institutions in the region (Gonzalez 1992; Raheb 1995). The Ottoman land reform of 1858 lifted restrictions on Christian landownership, allowing wealthy Christians to purchase land within the Bethlehem district, further reinforcing the Christian prominence in the area (Gonzalez 1992: 50).

Throughout the twentieth century, their prominence gradually diminished, as thousands of local Christians migrated to the Americas, often selling their land in the process (Gonzalez 1992; Sabella 1998). A lot of land was sold to Muslim families from other parts of the West Bank, such as the Hebron-area, and from the rural areas around Bethlehem. After the 1948 war and Israel's occupation of the West Bank in 1967, this development was further intensified. As a result, the Muslim presence in Bethlehem increased, gradually changing the social character of certain neighbourhoods. With time, this has become a cause of friction between more recent arrivals and the older families of Bethlehem. Members of the older families frequently complain that their town has been "taken over" by outsiders, and that Bethlehem is no longer "their town". The Hebron region in particular is seen as more culturally conservative than Bethlehem, and the 'Hebronites' are perceived as being very traditionally oriented in matters of family and gender norms. Historically, Bethlehem Muslims have looked upon themselves as being less traditional in their way of life than other Muslims—more in tune with the lifestyle of their Christian neighbours. As large family groups from Hebron and other parts of the West Bank make their presence felt, Muslims of Bethlehem origin[2] sometimes complain that the "Hebronites" have redefined what it means to be good Muslims in terms of dress codes, family structure and norms of everyday social conduct. Such nuances are often lost on local Christians, who find themselves losing their position to a rising Muslim middleclass (Lybarger 2007). In addition to this, the growing strength of Islamic movements and the decline of secular ideologies have served to create an atmosphere where tensions between old Bethlehemites and newcomers from other parts of the West Bank are increasingly described in sectarian rather than regional terms. One should however bear in mind that, historically, other sources of identity and social boundaries have converged with and occasionally transcended those of religious affiliations in the Bethlehem area.[3]

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[2] One Muslim family clan, the Fawaghreh, came originally from a village near Hebron and settled in Bethlehem in the middle of the eighteenth century. Along with six Christian family clans, they are generally seen as one of the original family clans of Bethlehem.

[3] One source of affiliation that has held social importance throughout Palestine is the ancient division between people who originated from Southern Arab tribes, referred to

Local Christians take great pride in Bethlehem's biblical heritage, and they feel a strong sense of collective ownership and responsibility for the Christian holy sites of the Bethlehem area, in particular the Church of Nativity (Raheb 2004). This creates a heightened sense of urgency about maintaining a strong Christian presence in Bethlehem, a town where they are outnumbered three to one by a growing Muslim population. In this context, many Christians see the purchase of Christian-owned land by Muslim families as part of a collective effort at marginalizing an already weak Christian presence.

Among local Christians, the sale of family land to Muslim buyers is not uncontroversial, but as such transactions have grown more common, those who sell their land do so at little risk of moral condemnation and social sanctioning.

Allegedly funded with money from Saudi banks, families of Hebron-origin have bought a substantial amount of land in Bethlehem and Beit Jala (Lybarger 2007). Such transactions are increasingly seen as indications of territorial aggression against Christian land ownership. In Beit Jala, The Orthodox Club has taken steps to prevent such transactions, raising funds to make counter-offers, and block the sale of Christian land to Muslim buyers. Further alarm has been caused by incidents of land theft through fabrication of property documents, and manipulation of the legal system.

### Internal Land Disputes in the West Bank

Since the PA was established in 1994, property scams and land-document forgery have emerged as a serious problem in Bethlehem, and in other parts of occupied Palestine.[4] After 40 years of Israeli occupation and continued confiscations, land is an increasingly scarce resource, and even within a

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as the 'Yamani', and the Northern Arab tribes, known as 'Qaysi'. In the Bethlehem area, the Christian clans of Bethlehem and Beit Sahour were perceived to be of Yamani origin, while the clans of Beit Jala were Qaysi (Elali 1991; Musallam 1999). During the late Ottoman period, between the late seventeenth and the early nineteenth centuries, conflicts would erupt and alliances would be mobilized in accordance with these ancient tribal divides. On several occasions, the clans of Beit Jala aligned themselves with Qaysi clans from the Hebron area, when confronting the Christian Yamani tribes of Bethlehem and Beit Sahour, or when confronting Muslim Yamani tribes in Jerusalem (Musallam 1999: 13).

[4] According to local real estate lawyers, similar problems of land theft are found in other parts of the West Bank as well, such as the cities of Jenin and Ramallah.

context of economic depression, property prices are rising, making land theft a very lucrative enterprise.

In 1996, two years after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, the Palestinian Ministry of Justice established Land Registration Offices throughout the Palestinian Territories (Fischbach 1996). These offices were assigned the task of updating the registry of land ownership handed over from the Jordanian period, registering formerly undocumented land ownership and settling disputes over land in cases where sufficient documentation on land-ownership was lacking or out-dated, or where different principles and claims of ownership might conflict with each other (LEI 2007). This initiative carried great symbolic weight: for the first time the Palestinians would take control of the administration of their own land (Fischbach 1996). But there were problems ahead. Building on a legacy of numerous land-reforms and shifting legal regimes, land registration in Palestine turned out be a messy affair.

### Land Ownership in a Historical Perspective

In 1858, as part of the Ottoman Tanzimat-reforms, Ottoman authorities issued a Land Reform, which, among other things, instructed landowners to have their private properties inscribed in a public land register, referred to as the Tapu. Within the framework of this law, agricultural land was largely defined as government land, essentially belonging to the Ottoman Sultan, and populated land was mostly defined as private land, to be registered in the name of individual landowners (Falah 1983; LEI 2007). Ottoman attempts at registering the use of agricultural land, as well as individual ownership of private land were resisted by farmers who wanted to avoid taxation for the use of agricultural land, and who found that a focus on individual land ownership conflicted with traditional notions of land as the collective property of family clans and village communities (Tamim 1995; LEI 2007: 26–27). As such, the authorities were unable to establish a full registry of land ownership in Palestine (Falah 1983). In the urban centres, individual landowners would have their land registered. However, once registered in the names of individuals, land would still be seen locally as the collective property of the families to which they belonged. Once the registered landowners passed away, their lands would be divided between family members, often without an update of ownership in the land registry. The collective organization of land was especially strong in the villages, where land could be sold or re-distributed within the family

without any formal registration of such agreements. To complicate matters further, some families systematically under-registered their lands to avoid taxes imposed by the late Ottoman Authorities (Tamim 1995; LEI 2007). A family owning some 200 dunums[5] may have been registered with only 40 dunums, although everyone in the local community would know what land belonged to which family.[6]

With the fall of the Ottoman Empire, parts of the Land Registration archives for the area were lost, and some ended up in Turkey. During the Mandate Period, the British authorities introduced the 'Land Settlement Ordinance' in 1928, in an effort to establish a complete land registry in which all types of land, including agricultural land would be registered in the names of individuals (Tamim 1995; LEI 2007). Again, this was fiercely resisted by Palestinian villagers as a violation of their tradition of communal ownership (Falah 1983). In some cases, all land belonging to a village would be formally registered in the name of the *mukhtar*, the head of a village or family clan, only to be redistributed and treated as communal land within the village itself. In this way, old and new concepts of landownership would be reconciled on a practical level, and control of the land would be kept within the community (Falah 1983; Tamim 1995).

After the 1948 war, the West Bank came under Jordanian rule, and in 1952 the Jordanian authorities started to establish an updated registry of landownership in the urban centres of the West Bank (Fischbach 1996). In the following years they completed an updated registration of land-ownership in Jenin, Nablus, and Ramallah, dividing properties registered in the names of deceased family patriarchs among their descendants. They started making a new land-registry for Bethlehem in 1967, but this work was aborted with the eruption of the Six-Day War a few months later. When Israel took control of the West Bank, the Jordanians were expelled, and the new land registry for Bethlehem was never completed.

Since 1967, Bethlehem has seen a dramatic loss of land due to Israeli confiscations for the building of settlements, military installations, by-pass-roads, and most recently, the Separation Wall. Within the com-

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[5]  Dunum or dunam is a unit of land measurement that dates back to the Ottoman period. The dunum referred to different measures in various countries. In Palestine, one dunum was equal to 920 square meters. Since 1928, the metric dunum, which equals 1000 square meters or 0.1 hectares has been in force.

[6]  This information and accounts of local practice are based on interviews with local real estate lawyers and individual landowners who have lost their land through different means, and local 'town historians' in Bethlehem.

munity itself, Christian families continued to sell their land, and most of these families have also left the country to settle in other parts of the world. In 1994 the main cities of Palestine, including Bethlehem were turned over to the Palestinian Authority (PA), within the framework of the Oslo Agreement (Farsoun and Aruri 2006). The PA established its own legal system, which would include the Land Registration Offices, also known as the Tapu Departments (Fischbach 1996). With time, an incomplete and chaotic system of land registration led to an explosion of land disputes that ended up in the Civil Court system (Fischbach 1996). In 2002, the Land Registration Offices were placed under the Palestinian Land Authority, but internal land disputes have remained a major problem throughout the Palestinian territories. In 2007, a government report estimated that "nearly 25 percent of the court disputes in the West Bank today are land related" (LEI 2007: 11). In the Bethlehem district, this situation has enabled certain individuals to claim other people's land through fabrication of land documents, and sometimes with the help of officials in the Land Registration Office and the Civil Courts.

### A Bethlehem Land Scam

An example of one such land scam illustrates the complexity and scale of the problem. In the early 1980s, Ameer,[7] a Christian businessman from Bethlehem bought a large piece of land covering 8 dunums in a central part of Bethlehem, close to the Bethlehem Intercontinental Hotel. In the following years, and especially after the Oslo Agreement, the commercial value of this property multiplied. In 2000 a group of investors that owned the Bethlehem Intercontinental Hotel made a generous offer to buy the property, but Ameer turned it down, as he had his own plans for the land. However, during the spring of 2002, he faced a counter-claim to the land from a man who asserted to have bought this piece of land from its previous owner at an earlier stage. This claim was brought before the Land Registration Office a few days prior to Israel's military siege of Bethlehem in March 2002, a siege that would paralyze the city for 39 days (Sennott 2003). By the time the siege was lifted, and Ameer was informed that someone else had made a claim for his land, the claim had already been accepted by the Land Registration Office, the entire process had been finalized, and Ameer's land was

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[7]  The names of individual characters have been changed throughout the text.

now the property of another man. After contacting a lawyer, Ameer was eventually confronted with the sales documents of the claimant. According to Ameer's lawyer, these documents were poor fabrications, printed on a type of paper that was not in use at the time when these documents were supposedly dated. Ameer then appealed to the Land Registration Office to have the case re-opened, but his appeal was denied.

However, the case did not end there. Being a resourceful and well-connected man, Ameer was determined to reclaim his land. While in his 20s and 30s, Ameer had studied and worked in the US and obtained an American passport. This enabled him to use the American consulate to put pressure on the PA and have his case reopened. He also had high ranking connections within the PA who could speak on his behalf. As a result, the case was eventually re-opened, and it was decided that the land documents involved would be thoroughly re-examined. According to his lawyer, the opposing claimant to his land also had valuable connections, allowing the case to be stalled for years. Nonetheless, after six years, the case was finally settled, and Ameer got his land back.

This case is not unique. According to real estate lawyers, public officials, and community activists in Bethlehem, there have been numerous cases in which people have lost their land to illegitimate claimants. The case described above illustrates the acquisition of land through mere fabrication of land-documents. Another common practice has been for two individuals to make conflicting claims to the same piece of land. Such cases have been examined within the Civil Court system, and decisions have been made, granting ownership of land to one of the claimants. In many such cases, the land in question has not belonged to any of the claimants. According to local sources, the real owners have often been out of the country, and, if present, they may not have been informed that someone else have claimed their land.[8] There are also cases in which people have faced illegitimate claims to their land from members of their own extended families. In the summer of 2007, Khader, a Christian landowner in Beit Jala, experienced this when some distant members of his family clan laid claim to a large piece of land to which he held legal title. When facing these relatives on his land, he started picking olives from his trees in a symbolic gesture asserting his claim to the land. He was then physically assaulted, and suffered minor head injuries caused by several blows. To avoid further physical

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[8]  This information is based on interviews with local real estate lawyers and individual landowners who have lost their land through a variety of ways.

confrontations, outsiders were brought in to mediate between the parties. A meeting was arranged, in which Khader presented documents from the Tapu-register, proving that he held title to the land in question. Nonetheless, the issue remained unsettled. Khader suspected that his relatives had made a deal to sell his land to a network of well-connected people and, if this was the case, that their claim to the land would be supported by the Land Registration Office. His fears were confirmed. The court dismissed his documents of ownership, and the land in question was handed over to his relatives.

A variety of strategies has been used to acquire land by dubious means, and it is widely believed that the majority of such land scams have depended on the complicity of officials within the Civil Court system. According to local real estate lawyers, the victims of such land scams have often made futile efforts at reclaiming their land before giving up, realizing that they have lost their land to people more powerful than themselves. Those in charge of these land scams are commonly referred to as the 'Land Mafia'. Their numbers are disputed, but in general they are assumed to be a group of people, some based in refugee-camps, some in the villages of Taʿamre next to Bethlehem, and some based in Bethlehem itself but belonging to families of Hebron origin. It is claimed that some of them work in the Palestinian Security Services, the Bethlehem Governorate, and the Civil Court System in Bethlehem; they are all said to be connected to Fatah, the ruling party within the PA. People in Bethlehem know who the key players are, and they also know that they cannot be held accountable for their actions, because of their connections within the PA, or because of their families' position. A fact that has not gone unnoticed is that the vast majority of those who have lost their land belong to Christian families, while the perpetrators are mostly of Muslim background.

Due to possible underreporting and the disputed nature of such cases, it is difficult to estimate how many families have lost their land to illegitimate claimants. Some locals argue that close to a hundred Christian families have lost land under questionable circumstances, while real estate lawyers dismiss these figures as widely overblown. It is important to point out that Christian families have been, and still are the biggest landowners in Bethlehem, making them the natural targets of such land-grabs. Nonetheless, many Christians see this phenomenon in sectarian terms, explaining the theft of land as part of an effort to marginalize the Christian community. As one Bethlehem landowner put it: "If they cannot buy our land, they just take it!" Though not shared by everyone, such interpretations are easily resorted to in a context of marked Christian-Muslim tensions, where local

Christians are increasingly concerned with their own demographic vulnerability. However, in the following, it will be argued that these land disputes must be understood as part of a wider picture, with reference to the state of law enforcement under the Palestinian Authority, and the primacy of family and community relations as a source of protection.

## Law and Order Under the Palestinian Authority

Since the PA took control of parts of the occupied territories, its governing institutions have been ridden with corruption, incompetence, and a systematic misuse of economic funds and human resources (Amundsen 2004; Khan 2004). Due to a combination of internal and external factors, the Palestinian Authority has failed to establish a functioning legal system and the rule of law in the occupied territories (Kelly 2004; Kelly 2006). With all its shortcomings, the Palestinian Authority, and especially its institutions of law-enforcement have enjoyed little trust and legitimacy among local Palestinians. Some of these shortcomings are the result of structural limitations to the coercive powers of the Palestinian Authority as defined by the Oslo Agreement (Kelly 2004). Within the parameters of the Oslo Accords, the West Bank was divided in three areas with different judicial status. In area A, which includes Palestinian urban centres, the PA would enjoy full civil and military jurisdiction; in Area B, which includes the areas surrounding most Palestinian towns, the PA would enjoy civil but not military control; finally, Area C, the most rural areas, and those surrounding Israeli settlements and military installations, would be under full Israeli jurisdiction. As such, the Palestinian police have limited legal right to apply coercive power in their efforts to enforce the law. Even though Palestinian Civil Law applies to area B, it is only in Area A that the Palestinian police can actually enforce the law. In Area B, any Palestinian police actions would require close co-ordination with the Israeli army. Since 2001, this coordination has broken down, leaving large areas of the West Bank in a legal vacuum (Kelly 2004: 8). In the Bethlehem region, this means that many of the areas outside of Bethlehem itself are beyond the reach of Palestinian law enforcement.

   To make matters worse, the Palestinian legal system is ridden with internal flaws. Palestinian police forces are underpaid, poorly trained, and generally perceived as lacking respect for the legal rights of those who find themselves at the centre of their attention. Historically, Palestinian society is structured around patrilineal family-clans, *hamulahs*, that unite groups

of families based on assumptions of shared origins, mainly along patrilineal lines (Rothenberg 1999). These clans have served several functions. First, clans are a source of individual and family security. Outsiders will think twice before attacking members of a powerful clan, knowing that revenge will be taken. When states are strong, and can protect their citizens, clans weaken. When states are weak, clans take on a heightened importance. According to Glenn Robinson, this dynamic has allowed clans to flourish and establish their neighbouring communities, especially after the break-down of the Palestinian Authority under the second Intifada (Robinson 2008). This, however, is not a new phenomenon in the Bethlehem area. Lawlessness and insecurity are recurring themes in descriptions of the Palestinian central highlands. Ali Qleibo writes about the security situation in Jerusalem and its hinterlands in the late Ottoman period: "Peasants in their villages were not safe, neither were city people outside the walls, for the marauding Bedouins, in the absence of a strong central government, raided and looted towns and villages and abducted women and children to be sold as slaves" (Qleibo 2009: 145–146).

In the Bethlehem area, the terror inflicted on Bethlehem and its nearby villages by raiding Bedouins has a central place in local folklore and local history from the late Ottoman period (Gonzales 1992: 51, 88). People speak with some resentment about the vast areas of land stretching towards the Judean desert that used to belong to Bethlehem, but that were forcibly taken over by Bedouin tribes as they settled down and established their own villages around Bethlehem. According to some sources, a certain level of security and rule of law was installed when the British Mandate took control of Palestine after World War I (Gonzalez 1992; Qleibo 2009). This was also the situation after 1948, when the West Bank was subjected to the rule of a centralized, strong Jordanian state.

## *The Politics of Tribalization*

Among the Christians of the West Bank, there were high hopes that the Palestinian Authority would be able to protect vulnerable local communi-ties. Instead, already powerful family clans have grown more powerful since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. This was partly a result of the politics of tribalization instituted by Yassir Arafat as President of the Palestinian Authority (Robinson 2008). In his efforts to bolster his own rule, and stem the influence of the new generation of political leaders known as 'the Intifada elite', Arafat sought to undermine institutional politics and

strengthen the politics of personality, family, and patronage (Robinson 1997; Amundsen 2004). Through a few important steps, Arafat secured his own powerbase and strengthened the influence of powerful family clans (Robinson 2008).

The first step was the adoption of an election law dividing the West Bank and Gaza into 16 electoral districts, where all parliamentary representatives had to be elected from their own district. This allowed large family clans to determine who would be elected from each district, creating a Parliament of clan leaders who were obedient to Arafat and his Cabinet.

The second step was to establish a Department of Tribal Affairs, encouraging the use of tribal law and *sulha*—traditional means of reconciliation—to resolve conflicts instead of turning to formal institutions of law enforcement. The Palestinian Authority has even made efforts to integrate traditional institutions of tribal law within its formal system of law enforcement (Frisch 1998; Bowman 2001). At a local level, the Palestinian Authority has encouraged people to settle conflicts and handle minor offences through the use of tribal law and family council, rather than involving the police. Traditional means of conflict resolution are used to deal with a whole range of problems, ranging from petty theft to more serious cases, sometimes even homicide (Bowman 2001). This is not a new phenomenon. In coexistence with centralized systems of law enforcement, the institutions of tribal law and family councils have been utilized to handle internal disputes among Palestinians under Ottoman, British, Jordanian and Israeli rule (Birzeit University 2006). Still today, *sulha* is widely used in societies throughout the Middle East. Under some circumstances, tribal law, and other traditional means of conflict resolution may prove effective in containing or resolving social conflicts. However, these methods seek reconciliation based on some form of consensus, and according to local sceptics, as well as recent studies on informal justice, they tend to do so to the benefit of more powerful clans, and at the cost of weaker clans and individuals belonging to smaller families (Birzeit University 2006: 108–110).

A third step in Arafat's empowerment of family clans was to allow for clan-based recruitment to his various security forces—14 at the most—which turned the security forces into vehicles of clan power and politics (Robinson 2008). The same pattern is evident within the regular police forces. In various districts of the West Bank, the police forces tend to be strongly dominated by specific clans, while other clans are so powerful that their members are beyond the reach of the law. As a result, the law is unevenly and arbitrarily enforced, and in some areas not enforced at all. The absence of the rule of law, and the impunity enjoyed by certain groups has been addressed by

researchers (Frisch 1998) as well as international reporters (Sennott 2003; Rees 2004). Some have emphasized the growing informal power of clans of Hebron origin in Bethlehem and other parts of the West Bank. Others have described how certain groups of people, due to the size of their family clans, or their status as resistance fighters, have been allowed to operate as Mafia-like networks within the Bethlehem area. Whether or not an incident can be treated as a criminal incident is not decided by the police, but depends on the identities of the actors involved.

### The Limits of Formal Law Enforcement

An incident that took place during the summer of 2007 can serve as illustration. In a Muslim village close to Bethlehem, a bitter dispute over distribution of family land reached a violent conclusion. At close range, and in broad daylight, a man shot and killed his two nephews outside their home. The killing had been witnessed by a number of people, some of whom reported the incident to the police. Having obtained detailed accounts of the event, Palestinian police officers came to arrest the perpetrator. The man was apprehended in his home and brought to a police van. But there, the police were confronted by a large group of men from the village. One of the village elders came forth, and told the police officers that they would not be allowed to arrest the perpetrator. The villagers demanded that they let him go, and made it clear that this tragic incident would be dealt with by the villagers themselves. The police had no choice but to let the man go, and they made no further attempts to arrest him.

This episode demonstrates some of the insufficiencies of PA law enforcement capacity.[9] In some cases, the Palestinian Authority does not have the capacity and authority, or the will, to enforce the law if this involves confronting certain community leaders and family clans. In Beit Sahour, a mixed Christian-Muslim town where I lived at the time, people referred to this case with great concern. When talking about the case, a local asked rhetorically:

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[9] This episode also illustrates some of the problems resulting from the transition to a new system of land registration. Within the local community, the attempt by the two young men to reclaim the land already sold by their father, was seen as a gross violation of local notions of honour and decency. For these young men, permanently based in Jordan, the transition to a new property system opened up opportunities for great economic gains at the expense of family honour and unity. The killing of these young men may have been seen as a rather dramatic reaction within their local village, but also as a timely warning to anyone else who might feel tempted to take advantage of the new system.

"If they can kill each other, and the police do nothing, what will they do if they kill one of us?" The assumption was that the police would be unable to react to such a crime against Sahouris as well and, as such, unable to provide any form of meaningful protection for the community. This reflects a general concern that both traditional means of conflict resolution and the absence of formal law enforcement tend to favour those who already are in a position of power. Under these circumstances, people depend on their own families and local communities for protection, and those belonging to large kinship groups are in an advantageous position compared to those belonging to smaller clans and less close-knit communities.

During the Second Intifada, the PA institutions of law and order collapsed rapidly, largely because they were the primary targets of Israeli military activities. During the first few years of the Intifada, the institutional framework of the Palestinian Authority was destroyed. This further strengthened the importance of clans as a source of protection. Robinson argues that the absence of any state authority left Palestinian society in a "near Hobbesian state" where "primordial groups—clans—were best suited to provide security and other basic social functions to their members" (Robinson 2008).

*The Fear of Powerful Clans*

A few years into the Intifada, the institutions of the PA, including its police forces, were gradually rebuilt. However, local power relations based on clan and community affiliations can be seen in all aspects of law enforcement. In the Bethlehem area, the most feared clan is commonly referred to as the Ta'amre. Ta'amre is the name of a stretch of villages close to Bethlehem and settled by a clan of Bedouin origin. Within the Bethlehem region, the people of Ta'amre are notorious for being clannish, for sticking to their group, and for being fiercely resistant to interventions by any kind of external authority (Sennott 2003; Rees 2004). People in the Bethlehem area—regardless of their sectarian background—approach them with fear and caution, and in some cases try to minimize their contact with them. There is a general impression that if you find yourself on bad terms with someone from Ta'amre, you may face reactions from their entire community in the form of violent retribution. These perceptions are fuelled by actual events, as well as widely held prejudices against Bedouin communities. Due to their regional notoriety, the people of Ta'amre, as well as other communities with a similar reputation, can do much as they please without being held accountable by the law. Local policemen can be very blunt about this, and

they readily confirm that people from certain communities, in particular the Taʿamre are regarded as "special cases", and that staying out of their way makes their job as policemen a lot easier.

A dramatic example of this was seen a few years ago, when a Christian man from Bethlehem accidentally bumped into a young woman from Taʿamre while driving his car. The woman was not injured, but the driver had her taken to a doctor, where she got a thorough examination before she was brought home to her own family. Afraid of facing any acts of retribution from the woman's family, the driver agreed to pay her family a sum of 300 Jordanian Dinars in compensation—the equivalent of a month's salary for most Palestinians. A year later, the brother of the unlucky driver had an encounter with the same family from Taʿamre. His daughter was hit by a car and killed instantly in the middle of Bethlehem. The driver had been driving recklessly, well above the speed limit and was apprehended by the police at the scene. After being brought into custody, he spent the following night in jail. The next day, the local police contacted the girl's father and informed him that the driver was the son of a powerful man from Taʿamre. The police then argued that this had been a tragic accident and that the driver wasn't really to blame for it. The girl's father found himself under heavy pressure to drop the case, and the driver was free to go. Among local Christians, some see the contrast between the two episodes as an example of the impunity enjoyed by members of the Taʿamre clan, as well as the relative powerlessness of local Christians. However, in this particular case, people would add that the outcome would have been the same if the girl had belonged to a Muslim family, as long as the driver belonged to the Taʿamre clan.

### Christian Vulnerabilities

These tendencies can shed some new light on the issue of land-disputes in the Bethlehem area. As mentioned earlier, most of the victims of these land scams have been Christians who owned land within the town limits of Bethlehem and neighbouring Beit Jala. However, Bethlehem's other neighbouring town of Beit Sahour has a higher population of Christians, who own large areas of undeveloped land;[10] yet they have not faced similar

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[10] More dunums of land belong to Bethlehem and Beit Jala than to Beit Sahour, but a larger share of this land has been confiscated by Israel for the construction of settlements, Israeli-only bypass-roads and the Separation Wall.

problems of land theft. According to real estate lawyers based in Bethlehem, there have been internal family disputes over land in Beit Sahour, but no incidents of people losing land to the so-called "land mafia" by way of document fabrication.

### The Special Case of Beit Sahour

Within the Bethlehem region, Beit Sahour has been attributed with certain social characteristics that may partly explain this difference. Until recent years, the people of Beit Sahour have refused to sell land to outsiders, leaving them much less vulnerable to the kind of land claims that have taken place in Bethlehem. Beit Sahour has also been known for its internal unity and its tribal characteristics as a community still structured along family and hamulah-lines, but also with a strong sense of community and solidarity against outside forces (Bowman 2001).

When conflicts have erupted between people from Beit Sahour and people from other nearby communities, Christians and Muslims from Beit Sahour have united against the external 'others'. A well-known incident took place in 2004, in which a young man from a nearby village used his cell-phone to take pictures up the skirts of a Christian girl who was standing in a clothes shop in Beit Sahour. The man was caught by the girl's fiancé, and an ugly fight broke out between the two. After a while, the man from the nearby village was joined by friends and relatives from his own village. They were, however, hugely outnumbered by a large group of Sahouris, both Christians and Muslims, who came to support the girl's fiancé. In the end, the men from the nearby village were sent running out of town. The man who started it all lost an eye in the fighting, and he had his car physically carried to the outskirts of Beit Sahour by a group of young men, and then put on fire. The Palestinian Authority—fearful of an inter-village fight that might escalate further—bought a new car for the original perpetrator, and the Presidential office made an appeal to the two communities, urging them to put an end to the dispute.

This incident along with histories of confrontations between young men from Beit Sahour and from the Hebron area are held up as illustrative of a kind of community solidarity that is attributed to Beit Sahour, and that may discourage attempts at taking land belonging to the community.[11] This kind

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[11] In addition, Beit Sahour enjoys a reputation as a community of resilience and internal solidarity after a famous campaign during the first Intifada, where the entire community

of solidarity is also ascribed to the many villages surrounding Bethlehem, but less so to Bethlehem itself.

In addition to large-scale emigration, the towns of Bethlehem and Beit Jala have undergone sweeping demographic changes from which Beit Sahour has been spared. This includes the building of three refugee-camps between Beit Jala and Bethlehem after the 1948 war, and the steady influx of internal migrants from the Hebron-area and from nearby villages. As a result, these communities stand out as deeply fragmented and marked by a series of tensions, between old families and new-comers to the area, between city-dwellers, villagers, and camp-based refugees, and between Christians and Muslims. This is where the land scams of the Bethlehem area have taken place, and those who lose their land are often families that have already left the country, or families that still live in the communities, but whose local presence has been substantially weakened through emigration.[12] These are families that find little protection within their local communities. They appear to be targeted because of their social vulnerability, and when well-connected people try to take their lands, they find themselves on their own.

If a long history of large-scale emigration has made certain families easy targets of land theft, the same set of mechanisms has left the wider Christian community of the Bethlehem area vulnerable to physical abuse, burglary, and other violations against their rights and properties. In a society characterized by lawlessness, local Christians find themselves in a protection gap, as the official system of law enforcement is too weak and unreliable, their own families too small, and their communal networks too fragmented to offer them adequate protection and security.

*Abusive Law Enforcement*

This collapse of the rule of law is a source of insecurity and alienation among some Christians in Bethlehem. People find that representatives of the legal system are not only unable, or unwilling to protect them, but that

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refused to pay taxes to the occupying government, and systematically disengaged from the Israeli economy by boycotting Israeli products.

[12] To make matters worse, families with a long history of emigration are also especially vulnerable to land confiscations at by the Israeli authorities. Since 1967, the State of Israel has applied the 1950 Absentee Property Law to justify the confiscation of Palestinian land that has not been used regularly, and properties that have not been inhabited for longer periods of time. Many of these families would have lost their land anyway, but their absence or limited presence in the area has provided Israeli authorities with a 'legal' pretext for confiscations.

they often abuse what little power they have. The Palestinian Authority is expected to serve and protect the rights of ordinary Palestinians, so when people find that their police forces neglect their duties or abuse their authority this is a source of profound disappointment.

One evening during the summer of 2007, two policemen entered a restaurant in Bethlehem. There were only a handful of guests, including two women, who are were in the company of two men. One of the women caught the attention of one of the policemen, who tried to engage her in a conversation. Failing to get her attention, the police officer started to make a scene and asked for the women's ID. The man running the restaurant tried to intervene, and asked the policeman if there were any trouble. The policemen then called for back-up, and decided to arrest the staff and all the guests in the restaurant, including a young man who was sitting at the bar, and who had not been involved in the encounter with the police. They were all put behind bars without any charges, and only after three days were they released from custody. In the meantime, the police have put out a rumour that the restaurant was closed and the guests were arrested because the female guests were prostitutes. Though this rumour was widely dismissed, it had a devastating effect on the restaurant, as most of the local people were reluctant to visit the place in the following month.

The restaurant is run by a Christian family, most of their guests are local Christians, and they serve alcohol as well as non-halal food to their guests. As such, the restaurant is largely seen as a fully Christian arena, where most local Muslims are unlikely to spend much time. By closing down the restaurant and spreading rumours about prostitution taking place there, the police greatly damaged the reputation of the establishment, making it a socially risky place for local Christians to visit. By arresting the entire staff and the guests without making any charges, the policemen were also demonstrating the practical extent of their powers as officials working within a system where they cannot be held accountable for their actions. Sami, who runs the restaurant on a daily basis, is reluctant to talk about sectarian tensions; he used to argue that local conflicts are largely class-based and political in nature. In this case, however, he states with great resentment that the policemen, who are all Muslims,[13] chose to treat them this way because he and the owner of the restaurant are Christians.

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[13] There are very few Christians working as police officers or low ranking public servants within the PA apparatus. According to themselves, this is mainly based on self-exclusion. Since wages within the PA apparatus are relatively poor, most Christians are not interested in working within the public system.

Sami is a committed veteran in the Fatah movement, and a dedicated Palestinian nationalist. He is also personally acquainted with the regional leader of the Palestinian security forces in Bethlehem. Nonetheless, in the last ten years he has experienced first-hand the absence of the rule of law in the Bethlehem district, and the culture of corruption and abuse that he feels has taken root among PA officials. With time, this has strained his faith in the Palestinian Authority. The episode when he was arrested while working at the restaurant was a turning point. Since then, he has tried to get a visa for the USA for himself and his family.

Elias is another local Christian who has lost faith in the local police forces. He works at a crisis centre in Bethlehem that shelters women in need of protection from members of their own families. Occasionally, the centre, the women it shelters, and the staff all face serious threats and assaults from the women's male relatives. The police have been unwilling to offer much in the way of protection for the centre and its employees. From Elias's perspective, this shows the reluctance of the police to address issues of genuine urgency.

When the Palestinian Authority was established, people had hoped that it would represent the Palestinians' interests, protect their rights, and establish an internal rule of law from which everyone would benefit. Instead, PA rule has only involved new forms of insecurity and powerlessness.

### The Problem of Foreign Intervention

Under these circumstances, local Christians experience a deepening sense of insecurity as their local strength and presence continue to decline. The absence of the rule of law combined with their own numerical inferiority fuel their worries about their own future in the area. However, the Christians of the Bethlehem area are far from powerless, and they do have one important asset at their disposal. Local Christian have strong ties to the Western world, and local clergy, politicians, academics, and civil society activists enjoy extensive connections with financial donors, media outlets and diplomatic representatives from European countries. However, they are very cautious about using international contacts to deal with their internal problems.[14]

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[14] Local Christians are cautious about attracting international attention, but they do not entirely refrain from doing so. Internal concerns such as the issue of land theft have been raised with foreign authorities, such as the US Consulate in Jerusalem. This is reflected in

As Palestinians, they find it hard to engage in public criticism of their own community, as there are always those waiting to use such criticism to further dismiss Palestinian national demands and question the legitimacy of their cause. Christian leaders are worried that an international focus on conflicts along sectarian lines may harm the standing of the Palestinian community abroad. It is also feared that an international focus on internal tensions may divert attention away from the Israeli occupation and its crippling effect on the Palestinian economy, widely seen as the main source of worries among Christian Palestinians (Soudah 2006). Within the Bethlehem region, Israel has confiscated large areas of land—much of it from Christian families—to expand Jewish settlements, and to build the Separation Wall in a half circle around Bethlehem, devastating the city's economy (UN OCHA 2004; Bowman 2007; UN OCHA 2009). These violations represent a far greater assault on Bethlehem's Christian presence and land rights than the issue of internal land disputes. Although they are concerned about internal corruption, land theft, and the failure of functioning law-enforcement under PA rule, leading Palestinians do not trust international media to present such issues in a responsible manner and to place them within the right context. They know from earlier experiences that international reporting on internal problems of a sensitive nature, such as the issue of land theft, can be used against the Palestinian Authority, to create an alarmist image of Muslim extremists driving Christians out of Palestine (Cook 2008: 238). One example of this was seen in June 2006, with the proposal for a resolution in the U.S. Congress that accused the Palestinian Authority of prosecuting and discriminating against Christian Palestinians: it called for tougher US sanctions against the Hamas-led government in power at the time.[15] No representatives of the local Christian community had been consulted in preparation for this proposal. Once publicized, the proposal was widely condemned by local Church leaders and political figures that identified the State of Israel as the primary aggressor against local Christians.

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the section on Israel and the occupied territories in the International Religious Freedom Report 2008, issued by the US. State Department: *"The PA did not take sufficient action during the reporting period to remedy past harassment and intimidation of Christian residents of Bethlehem by the city's Muslim majority. The PA judiciary failed to adjudicate numerous cases of seizures of Christian-owned land in the Bethlehem area by criminal gangs. PA officials appeared to have been complicit in property extortion of Palestinian Christian residents, as there were reports of PA security forces and judicial officials colluded with gang members in property extortion schemes."* http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2008/108484.htm accessed 17.11.2009.

[15] A website that contains link to the the full text of the resolution, and to some local responses to it: http://imeu.net/news/article001823.shtml accessed 17.11.2009.

### An Ethos of National Unity

Most importantly, prominent Christians have reservations about criticizing Muslim Palestinians in general, worried that this may reflect poorly on the Christian minority. Based on their historical prominence, the Christians of Bethlehem—especially the old landowning families—are seen as a privileged upper and middle-class minority of superior wealth and education. As such, claims of discrimination or anti-Christian hostilities can be perceived by many local Muslims as the self-serving and unfounded whining of a spoiled Christian elite. Raising such concerns internationally is also seen as violating an ethos of national unity, the obligation to address internal differences in internal forums, while projecting national unity outwards. This ethos is based on a rationale that national liberation can only be achieved through unity, and that internal differences can be dealt with once the national struggle has been won. This rationale is eagerly exploited by government officials, who often discourage Palestinians from claiming their rights through the legal system in the name of "national unity" (Kelly 2006). The public discourse on sectarian relations is very much shaped by such political concerns and ideals of self-restraint. At the same time, many Christians feel that unless these internal problems are discussed openly, they cannot be dealt with in any effective manner. Within the community, this stands out as an enduring dilemma of whether to stay silent for the sake of national unity, or speak out about internal concerns, and invoke external interventions on behalf of their sectarian community.

Writing on Lebanon, Longva (in this volume) contrasts the positive attitude among Christian Maronites towards the interventions of foreign powers on their behalf, against the more sceptical attitude found within the Greek Orthodox community. She explains this difference with reference to the historical narratives and aspirations for the future that are held within the two communities. Among Christian Palestinians, external interventions have been a source of privilege and protection, as well as alienation from their home community. Reservations about utilizing international connections reflect concerns about the prospects of a Palestinian national project, as well as their own place in it. Historically, Christian leaders, both local Church leaders and political figures, have been heavily committed to a secular nationalist vision of a Palestinian community, and many of them have been actively engaged in left-wing political factions such as the PFLP and the DFLP as well as Fatah (Aburish 1993; Lybarger 2007). As they see it, the secular nationalist project depends on a convincing projection of cross-sectarian Palestinian unity, both internally, and in relation to the

international community. What is at stake here is the very notion of a national 'We' in which they, as Christian Palestinians, can claim a sense of belonging.

However, not all local Christians share these concerns. Following the first Intifada, there has been a growing split between a secular camp and an Islamist camp within the Palestinian territories. The popular growth of the Islamist camp, the malgovernance of the PA, and the failure of the peace process have disillusioned and alienated many Christian Palestinians who once identified with the secular nationalist camp. Writing about political identities among West Bank Palestinians during the Oslo Years, Lybarger identifies three distinct identity orientations among Christian Palestinians who had their political awakening during the first Intifada. One involves the continued perpetuation of a traditional secular nationalism, one advocates a Christian religio-communal revitalization that mirrors the Islamist revitalization, and one involves an apolitical escape into an otherworldly religious piety (Lybarger 2007). As already mentioned, many prominent Christians still retain a strong commitment to secular nationalism, and their reservations about speaking out on internal differences can be seen as a reflection of this. By contrast, those who belong in the religio-communal camp are less troubled by such reservations. In fact, some are quite eager to focus on sectarian tensions, and on internal problems faced by Christians in the region. One of them is Khalid, an old Fatah veteran who returned to Bethlehem in 1994 after two decades in Kuwait. Back in Bethlehem he founded a Christian media centre that focuses on news and religious broadcasting. He has been very concerned with what he sees as the informal discrimination and lack of legal protection for Christians under the Palestinian Authority. For years, he has accused Muslim Palestinians of trying to drive out local Christians through violence, intimidation, land theft, and violations against their properties. He has also accused the Palestinian Authority of wilfully allowing such abusive practices to take place. This has caused some alarm among other Christians, who see him as a sectarian alarmist and a liability to themselves, as Christians and as Palestinians. His most ardent opponents have accused him of playing the "persecuted Christian-card" in his efforts to secure international funding for his media centre. During the fall of 2007, Khalid had an interview appointment with a news crew from a German TV-network, in which he planned to talk about the internal problems facing Christian Palestinians. Local Christians working with other media centres and NGOs in Bethlehem were informed about this. Fearing that he would give an overly one-sided and dramatic presentation of local realities, they contacted the German TV crew

and talked them into cancelling the interview. In this particular case, they were worried about what kind of image would be presented to a European audience, and less about the effect such a report could have within the local community.[16] As such, this intervention from other members of the Christian community may be seen as an expression of enduring commitments to secular nationalism, and to an ethos of national unity.

This commitment can be both principled and pragmatic in nature. Christians who are active in local politics argue that turning to foreign governments or international media will only backfire, whereas trying to address problems like land theft and the rule of law through internal political structures may actually lead somewhere. On the issue of land theft, efforts to work within the system have had some effect.

In the spring of 2007 efforts were made by the Palestinian Authority to address the issue of land theft. A handful of people associated with land scams were arrested, and a few properties were returned to their rightful owners. Sceptics then said that those who were arrested where peripheral to the network, that key players would go free and that a lot of land would remain in the wrong hands. Later on, in November 2008, the Palestinian Land Authority started a long-term investigation aimed at determining the rightful ownership of disputed land in the West Bank. This process, which involves a re-examination of questionable land claims over the last 15 years, was started in Bethlehem Governorate, and the process in Bethlehem alone is expected to take several months. This investigation has been met with local optimism and hopes that, in time, most of the disputed properties will be returned to their rightful owners.

Whatever the outcome of this process, the Bethlehem land disputes illustrate some of the flaws and shortcomings of law-enforcement in the Palestinian Authority. With a legal system ridden with corruption and dictated by informal power-structures, family and community networks remain important as sources of security. Unless the general inadequacies of the legal system are addressed more forcefully, Christian Palestinians may be left with a continued protection gap, at risk of further violations against their rights and properties.

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[16] Whereas English-language channels based in the USA or the United Kingdom are seen and understood by many within the Bethlehem community, German TV channels are less available, and certainly less watched, in spite of a sizeable Bethlehem diaspora in Germany. It is therefore assumed that a news report on German television could pass almost unnoticed within the local community.

## Conclusion

The situation of Christian Palestinians on the West Bank is characterized by a mix of structural power and powerlessness. On the one hand, they are a resourceful minority, with an over-representation in public offices and in educational and cultural institutions throughout the West Bank. As such, they enjoy cultural influence and a political voice in Palestinian society that far exceed their numbers. At the same time, they are vulnerable to land theft, extortions and other criminal activities that are not dealt with in a satisfactory manner by the Palestinian Authority. This paradoxical situation reflects an on-going struggle within Palestinian society between a social order built around family clans, in which Christians are largely powerless and unable to defend their own rights, and one built around formal institutions, where they possess the right resources to be in a position of strength. Under these circumstances, the PA's efforts to incorporate a clan-based order within an institutionally based legal order have served to increase Christian vulnerabilities to land theft and other violations at the hands of more powerful groups.

In spite of this, prominent Christians are reluctant to utilize Western contacts in their efforts to deal with these problems, seeing this as harmful to their own standing within the Palestinian community, and to the international standing of a Palestinian national project to which they themselves are committed. In general, Christian leaders find that that their interests as a community are best served by framing their problems in non-sectarian terms, with reference to lawlessness and clan-rule, and to work through the institutional and political channels of the Palestinian Authority to address these issues. In this context, many local Christians see their own rights and security depending to be dependent on the development of a Palestinian Authority with a functioning legal order with formal institutions that can confront, rather than incorporate, a traditional clan-based social order.

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## CONVIVIALITY AND CONFLICT IN CONTEMPORARY ALEPPO

### Annika Rabo

Aleppo is a city with a long history of religious, linguistic and ethnic heterogeneity. Five hundred years ago the city was a node in a vast network of trade stretching across Asia and Europe and it was well-known to seekers of fame and fortune. This is no longer the case, and although Aleppo's inhabitants and daily visitors exhibit ethnic, linguistic and religious heterogeneity, the city can be said to have become increasingly parochial and homogenous in the last decades. There is a particular kind of Sunni Muslim Arab public dominance in the city, but 'minorities' still publicly manifest their various identities in their 'own' urban quarters. There are also nostalgic memories of 'before', when everyday-life was more 'open and carefree'.

The co-existence of diverse urban populations is a highly debated and urgent issue in the contemporary world. In these debates Middle Eastern cities can be used either as a model to emulate or as a warning example. Both the historical and present-day Middle East can be—and are—utilized in such discussions. In this chapter I will draw on anthropological fieldwork in Aleppo from the late 1990s and onwards to discuss and analyse discourses on interethnic/religious co-existence between Sunni Muslim Arabs and Kurds, and between Muslims and members of various Christian sects. Cosmopolitanism is a concept often used to capture the ability to handle and accept differences associated with urban life and urbanity. *Cosmopolitan* and *cosmopolitanism* have clearly become buzz-words in many kinds of debates and in many academic disciplines. Ingvild Gilhus notes that cosmopolitan ideas took root in antiquity, where the Stoics departed from the ideal of man as rooted in a narrow *polis*. Migration from the city-states and social and political unrest were important factors in the development of a cosmopolitan culture. The *cosmopolis* came to designate "a city of the world in which all people were equal, independent of race and class" (Gilhus 2006: 12).

In this chapter I will instead use the term *conviviality* to capture an everyday 'living together' commonly found in Aleppo. Paul Gilroy uses conviviality in the context of urban postcolonial cities, and understands it

as the process of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculture an ordinary feature of social life. Conviviality "makes a nonsense of closed, fixed, and reified identity" (2004: xi).The conviviality of Aleppo, however, is different. It is not based on the fusing or merging of persons with various religious or ethnic backgrounds. Instead, it is historically rooted in the Ottoman organization of *ta'ifa* whereby some (religiously based) 'sects' were recognized by the sultan and given certain kinds of intra-communal autonomy (cf. Longva, this volume). In the nineteenth century the recognized 'sects' came to be called *millet* (Yapp 1987: 6). The Ottoman way of dividing its subjects according to religious/national affiliation has both survived and been transformed in independent Syria.

I will also argue that the role of the Syrian state is crucial for both the transformation and survival of the pre-independence 'millet system'. The state is also directly implicated in the discourses on conflict and conviviality in contemporary Aleppo. Issues of ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity are highly sensitive among Syrian power-holders, partly due to the heritage of Arab nationalism. The popular memories of the so called 'Events' of the late 1970's, when Syria was caught in a bloody conflict between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Syrian armed forces, are still very vivid in Aleppo and play an important role in how my informants categorize themselves and others.[1]

### Aleppo, the Syrian State and Heterogeneity

Syria is, and has been, an area of great ethnic, religious and linguistic heterogeneity. The ethnic and religious composition of Syria is in many ways guesswork because official statistics on such issues are not available. However, an educated guess is that Christians constitute about 12 percent, divided into at least fourteen sects with the Greek Orthodox as the largest. Most Christians describe themselves as 'Arab', but there are also Armenians. Besides, many Syrian Orthodox Christians regard themselves as both an ethnic and a linguistic group.[2] Most Muslims are Sunni, perhaps 60–65

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[1] This article does not cover events of the Syrian revolt in 2011, the outcome of which is not clear at the time of writing. It can, however, be read as a background to that revolt.

[2] It is extremely difficult to claim with certainty the size of the various Christians communities in Syria. I follow the book *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East. The Challenge of the Future* (ed. Andrea Pacini 1998). The numbers given are, approximately, as follows (Appendix 3, pp. 312–326): Greek Orthodox 503.000 members, Armenian Orthodox 112.000 members, Melkite 111.000 members, Syrian Orthodox 89.000 members, Maronites

percent. Many of the Sunni Muslims are Kurds, but Kurds are also Yezidi, and some are Shi'a Muslim. The Druzes consider themselves as 'Arab', as do the Alawis, both of whom are Muslim splinter sects, regarded by many Syrians as special 'ethnic' groups. There are also various kinds of Shi'a Muslims. Finally there are small ethnic/linguistic minorities like Turkmen and Circassians.

Many minorities have clustered in specific regions, but most towns and cities today have attracted migrants from all kinds of ethnic and religious backgrounds. The 'ethnic-religious mix', however, differs from one region to another and from one city to another. There are no rural Kurdish or Alawite clusters in the south of Syria, and no rural Druze clusters in the north. The variety of Christian sects is greater in the north than in the south. The Druzes are concentrated in the southwest mountain region of Syria. Many have become refugees following the Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights in 1967. The Alawis' 'original' area is the northwest mountain region.

Questions of ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity are highly complex in Syria, and the use of terms like *majority* or *minority* are both sensitive and imprecise. 'Minority'—*aqalliyya*—is not used in official Syrian discourse. Both power holders and citizens-at-large tend to stress that 'we are all Syrians' (cf. Migliorino 2007: 99). The same seems to be true for other parts of the Arab world/ Middle East. Seteney Shami (2009: 151) notes that in Egypt

> the translation of '*aqalliyya* for 'minority' is straightforward enough. Difficulties arise when it comes to deciding whether the word applies to Egyptian, Arab, and Muslim societies—and if so which groups should be designated as such—and whether acknowledging the word 'minority' necessarily implies a political and social 'problem'.

In Syria the ruling Ba'th party embraces an ideology of pan-Arab secularism, whereby all ethnic and religious differences are publicly under-communicated. The very concept *minority* is often said to be a Western colonial device to divide people of the Middle East into a myriad of competing groups. All Syrian citizens are said to be equal and—very importantly—all are supposed to be equally Arab. A large ethnic and linguistic minority like the Kurds in northern and northeast Syria, with possible irredentist

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28.000 members, Armenian Catholics 25.000, Syrian Catholics 23.000, Assyrian Church of the East 17.000 members, Roman Catholics 11.000, Chaldean Church 7.000 members, Protestants 2.000. Courbage (2007: 189), however, calculates considerably fewer Christians. It can be argued that this preoccupation with numbers and percentages is part and parcel of the construction of such contested terms as majority/minority.

ambitions, is viewed as a potential threat to Arab unity.[3] Yet if the Baʻth party was originally more successful among Syrian (rural) minorities like the Druzes, the Alawis, and the Christians, it was because it aimed to overthrow the mainly Arabic-speaking Sunni Muslim urban elite with vast interests as landowners in the countryside. Since the Baʻth takeover in 1963, the ethnic composition of party members has both broadened and narrowed. More and more public employees have been obliged to join the party for career purposes, thus broadening the membership. At the same time putsches have narrowed the 'membership' of the behind-the-scene's power holders.[4] Analysts and popular opinion, both inside and outside Syria, have for decades claimed that the Baʻth party, the army, and the secret services are under the control of the Alawis.[5]

   The sectarian composition of the regime and its possible 'ethnic interests', are thus a highly complex issue. Here I simply want to stress that the ruling party, and the regime, have not been successful in their goal of eradicating religious and ethnic differences in Syria. On the contrary, people in Syria, especially in the cities, are exceedingly aware of such differences. They also produce and reproduce such differences through talk in their daily lives. Official policies in which ethnic and religious differences are ignored or negated have, I contend, contributed to turning religious and ethnic sensitivities into vehicles for the presentation of selves and others. In such presentations gender plays a central role, which will be explored in more detail below.

*Muslim Arabs and Muslim Kurds*

Compared to a hundred years ago, Aleppo is less ethnically, linguistically and religiously heterogeneous. The Jewish population has all but

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[3] For analysis on the invisibility or visibility of the Kurds in Syria see Jordi Tejel Gorgas (2007).

[4] Most Syrians make little distinction between the ruling party and the regime. However, according to most observers and Syrians at large, the importance of the Baʻth party has decreased in the past decade.

[5] The scope and meaning of Alawi dominance in Syria is contested among researchers. Some in a rather 'primordialist' position see Syrian politics as—more or less—the outcome of ethnic and sectarian struggles (e.g. Nikolaus van Dam, 1981). But most see sectarian issues in a more 'instrumentalist' vein, as the effect of political struggles. Derek Hopwood notes that "Sunnis tend to exaggerate the Alawi nature of the regime" but stresses that this perception in itself "can foment discontent" (1988: 98).

disappeared,[6] and in the old city the bazaar traders predominantly present themselves as urban Arab Sunni Muslim. However, Aleppo is still a polyglot, multi-ethnic and multi-sectarian city. Kurds are the largest ethnic and linguistic minority in the city, most of them quite recent migrants from the predominantly Kurdish rural areas to the north and northwest of Aleppo.[7] There are large concentrations of Kurds in quarters on the northwest edge of the city. Many semi-rural Kurds, with no Aleppo abode, live with their families on construction sites as guards and caretakers. Many of the Kurds who live in the northwest quarters of the city work in construction and stone-masonry, often as free-lance labourers. Local lore claims that almost all waiters in restaurants and a great many taxi-drivers are Kurds. Kurdish women work in all kinds of domestic service and in home industries. Many of the rural customers in the medina are Kurds coming to shop. Arab Aleppians often stereotype Kurds as rural, poor and uneducated, and clichés about Kurdish stubbornness are common.[8] Kurdish women, whether rural visitors or urban dwellers, do not, in general, cover their faces, nor wear the long black coat typical of contemporary Aleppo female Sunni Muslim Arabs. Well-off or middle-class and educated Kurdish women veil themselves to a lesser extent than Arab women. My Kurdish informants in Aleppo, for their part, stereotype Arabs as small-minded and fixed on controlling the female use of space.

The presence of many Kurds in Aleppo has a profound impact on ethnoreligious relations in the city. The Kurds are not Christian, but neither do they typify a Muslim urbanity. Kurds and Christians are, in a sense, jointly able to challenge Sunni Arab dominance in public space.

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[6] There are still many older inhabitants in Aleppo with clear memories of Jewish presence in the city and their importance in the market. For the importance of Aleppo in the memory of its Jewish diaspora see Walter Zenner (2000) and Haim Sabato's novel *Aleppo Tales* (2005).

[7] Many Kurds from the Jazeera do not have Syrian citizenship. This is not the case for Kurds from the Aleppo region. But migration from the Jazeera to Aleppo means that today there are stateless Kurds also in Aleppo.

[8] Such clichés are typically expressed about all rural migrants. Some of my informants expressed the view that the influx of rural migrants had destroyed the fabric of urban life. Aleppo streets and the 'popular' quarters are dominated by people who lack sophistication and 'culture' "They are like ants. They are everywhere and they have too many children and no plans for their future" one informant told me in the late 1990s, when complaining about the changes in Aleppo. Many who classified themselves as *urban* Aleppians characterized people they despise as 'rural' or 'tribal' to rob them of their urbanity and urban belonging. Complaints about the rural influx into Aleppo are also a way of complaining about the regime. 'Rural' or 'tribal' is a common metaphor in many larger Syrian cities for either Alawis in general, or for Ba'th party members, as well as for the armed forces, or for people working in the security agencies.

## *Arab Christians and Armenian Christians*

In the seventeenth century Christians constituted about a fifth of the Aleppo population. Today the percentage is smaller, but is still higher than the Syrian average of perhaps 12 per cent, and—according to common Syrian knowledge—higher than the share found in Damascus. Aleppo Christians are divided between more than a dozen denominations, each with its separate Churches. The largest group is the Greek Catholic followed by members of the Armenian, Syrian and Greek Orthodox Churches. Aleppo Christians are 'ethnically' divided into Arabs and Armenians. While Kurds are not allowed to establish separate schools or to teach Kurmanji, the dominant Kurdish language in Syria, Armenians have been allowed to set up their own separate schools.[9] Armenians have lived in Aleppo as traders since the Middle Ages. Larger communities, mainly from present-day Iran and Turkey, settled in the city from the seventeenth century onwards. But the large influx of Armenians came at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the persecution of Armenians took place in present-day Turkey (cf. Migliorino 2007: 99). The Arab attitude towards Armenians in Aleppo is somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand, people are impressed by what is seen as the fantastic work ethos and skills of Armenians. Many Christians admire and envy their ability to set up schools, newspapers, mutual aid groups, and culture clubs. On the other hand, they are often seen by all others as clannish and self-contained, since Armenians rarely intermarry with other Christians.[10]

   Christians in Aleppo, more than the Kurds, have varied backgrounds and life-styles. There are poor Christians living in close proximity to, or inter-mixed with, Kurds. There are very rich Christians who live in Christian 'enclaves', but also in 'mixed' quarters, or in an old bourgeois quarter nearer to the centre. Muslims tend to classify Christians as 'well-off', because some of the extremely rich Aleppians are from well-known Christian families. Christians tend to see themselves as better educated than Muslim Aleppians, and many Muslims would agree with this. Before the nationalization of the private schools, Aleppo Christians had access to a great number of schools under foreign and often religious sponsorship.

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   [9]  Nicola Migliorino (2007: 104 ff.), however, argues that education in Armenian has suffered from Syrian state policies.
   [10]  Nicola Migliorino (2007) has an interesting discussion on the activities of the Armenian diaspora in Syria and its relationship to the Syrian state.

Today this is no longer so,[11] but the idea that 'Christians love education' still prevails in Aleppo (and in many other parts of Syria). From the middle of the nineteenth century the old, rich Christian elite families amassed their fortunes in trade, industry and real estate. In the early 1960s in connection with the takeover by the Ba'th party, large private enterprises were nationalized, and Christians and Muslims alike were affected by these policies. The Christian 'new rich', who have benefited from Open Door policies of the 1980s and the 1990s and from connections with the political elite, are traders/industrialists, just like their Muslim counterparts.

A few decades ago retail shops in the predominantly Christian quarters of Aleppo were generally owned and managed by Christian themselves. Some of these quarters—quite in the centre but outside the old city—became the first 'modern' shopping areas of Aleppo in the beginning of the twentieth century. They were especially geared towards female shoppers. One area (along Tellal street) has now become a shopping area mainly for Muslim lower and middle-class customers, while another (Aziziyye and the surrounding area) is more mixed. Its back streets are where many young male and female Christians take a stroll in the evening, buying soft drinks or snacks from the numerous stands. According to Christian informants, many of the shopkeepers in these 'Christian' quarters are now Muslim, partly due to the increase in the number of shops in general, but also to the decrease in the ratio of Christians to Muslims. They also underline and complain that Christians, in general, marry later and have fewer children than Aleppo Muslims, and that they have migrated and left Syria at a greater rate. But there are also different opportunity structures for Muslims and Christians, with the latter, where possible, seeming to prefer to open offices or workshops, rather than to work in retail. Christian traders—from all sects—in the old bazaar have all but disappeared. Only a few decades ago, for example, Christians in general, and Armenians in particular, used to dominate the large gold market in the central bazaar. Now Sunni Arab Muslims dominate this market. There is still, however, a majority of Christian/Armenian silver- and gold-smiths in the historical Christian quarter (Jdeide/Saliba).

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[11] Since the early twenty-first century private schools (and even universities) are re-emerging at an amazing speed in Syria, and private entrepreneurs see such institutions as good investments. There are now new schools owned and operated by Christian organizations but open to all pupils. There are also many primary schools and kindergartens based on an Islamic ethos.

*Public Display of Religious Belonging*

Friday is the official day off when all public offices and most shops are closed. In the Christian quarters, traders and shopkeepers may close on Sundays instead. Many shoppers, especially women, find this very convenient and on Fridays the streets in these quarters are usually very crowded. Shops should be closed one day a week, but many shops actually open every day. Shopkeepers can claim that they have both Muslim and Christian employees and that these choose when they want to be free. Christian traders may elect to close on Friday because their partners and customers take that day off, and for some Muslim traders Sunday is a slack day because their trade might be connected more to export. But generally speaking, the daily and the weekly rhythm of the city are marked by the Islamic calendar. The calls to prayer, the weekly Friday off, the official holidays, all underline that Islam is the dominant faith in Aleppo. But the Islamic rhythm also serves as a social boundary against followers of other faiths and the less religiously inclined.

The Christian minority put their religious paraphernalia on public display in the predominantly Christian quarters, before and during Christmas and Easter celebrations. The 'religious' Christmas decorations of the Christians in Syria have acquired a distinctly 'Western' touch and now include Christmas trees and Santa Claus. Christmas is celebrated on the same dates by all Syrian Christians except the Armenians, who use the Julian calendar and celebrate Christmas on January 6. This date is also the 'real' Church feast for the Greek Orthodox, but they have joined the Catholic Churches in order to have a common 'popular' celebration of Christmas. But Easter is only intermittently celebrated on the same dates by the Eastern Orthodox and the Catholic Churches.[12] Some Christians, on the other hand, argue that it is better when all celebrate at the same time, because they can then manifest a sense of Christian unity, and processions and feasting are much nicer when all their friends take a holiday at the same time.

All public employees—Muslim and as well as Christian—are allowed one day off for Christmas and two days off for Easter (as well as three days off for *ʿid al-adha* and *ʿid al-fitr* respectively). During the year each Church has its own rules for fasts and its own series of saintly holidays

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[12]  Since Easter is the most important religious holiday, the Orthodox stick to their own calculation of when it can be celebrated, i.e. only after the Jews have celebrated Pesach. However, about every four years the Catholic and Orthodox Easter celebrations coincide.

and celebrations, but many celebrate Saint Barbara's day in early December as a festival for children. Muslims and Christians in Aleppo exchange greetings on each other's religious feasts, and may visit each other. Older traders told me that when the old central bazaar had more Christian (and before the late 1940s and early 1950s, Jewish) traders, they always used to greet each other and pay their respects on the various holidays. It is obviously hard to know the scope and extent of such mutual civilities. But such comments at least indicate a perception of good neighbourliness which, generally speaking, has been perpetuated until today as a standard for proper public behaviour. There is still a widespread idea—and ideal—that in Aleppo people should be civil and civilized, and take a certain interest in the public rituals of others.

Muslim and Christian religious holidays are thus publicly and mutually acknowledged in Aleppo (as elsewhere in large Syrian cities). The ruling Ba'th party embraces the ideology of Pan-Arabism in which all potential religious and ethnic conflicts are under-communicated in public political life, as mentioned above. Initially the party recruited heavily from the various Syrian minorities and, in the eyes of many Sunni Muslims, the regime itself came to be regarded as anti-religious, despite the fact that the Syrian Constitution requires the President to be Muslim. In the late 1970s President Hafez al-Asad, an Alawi, started to cultivate a public air of Sunni religiosity. On all major Muslim religious holidays he, and other high-ranking members in the government and the Ba'th party, prayed in the large Ummayad Mosque in Damascus. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, after a near civil war in Syria (euphemistically called *al-hawaadeth*, 'the Events') resulting in the brutal eradication of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamic aura of the regime increased. The state supported the building of new mosques and encouraged Muslims to follow a non-political religious path. Many Syrians of all faiths have been, and are still, highly critical of this change of policy, which is commonly considered as insincere and shaped by political expediency. Today there is still a strong prejudice among urban Sunni Muslims, not least in Aleppo, against Alawis. At the same time Sunni Muslims enjoy the increased public religious opportunities.

The increasingly 'Islamic' character of public space in a city like Aleppo, epitomized by increased female veiling and an emphasis on gender differences, heightens the fears of many Christians who have come to regard the 'minority' character of the regime as a safeguard against increased Islamic public dominance. During Christian feasts the President will visit, or be visited by, major Christian patriarchs and bishops, and church ceremonies are broadcast to the public on radio and television, underlining the equal

value of all Syrian citizens, regardless of their faith. There is one major celebration in Syria which is studiously ignored, however. The Kurdish New Year celebration (*nauroz*) takes place at every spring equinox. In Aleppo, with its large Kurdish population, and in the Kurdish villages in the Aleppo hinterland, this is an important day which receives no official recognition, but which, on the contrary, is carefully supervised and at times repressed. Kurds, when publicly celebrating the New Year, express their Kurdishness outside the fold of officially cultivated Arab unity.

### An 'Open' and a 'Closed' City

Aleppo of the early twenty-first century is an open city with no visible boundaries, or borders, restricting individuals' use of 'public' space. In principle any Aleppian (or visitor) can move about town at any hour of the day. According to all my informants, public security is very good. During my various fieldwork periods since the late 1990s, this has often been stressed as something particular for Syrian cities in general, and for Aleppo in particular. Informants underline that women can leave wedding parties in the early hours of the morning, wearing jewellery worth a fortune, without fear of being robbed. Assault is said to be a very unusual crime, and people in the bazaar casually carry large sums of money in the ubiquitous Syrian black plastic bags. Public theft is rare, and city inhabitants say that they appreciate the level of public security, to which they claim they contribute by caring and looking out for each other. Many in Aleppo, however, underline that the ability of the state to protect its citizens and their property is crucial to retaining its last vestiges of legitimacy in the eyes of the citizens.[13]

There are, however, numerous invisible boundaries working to police access to and utilization of public space. Space managed or owned by the Syrian state or the Aleppo council, such as streets, squares and gardens, can be defined as 'public space'. But this delineation covers only a small part of such a concept. While mosques are publicly managed, churches are not, yet churches are clearly not 'private space'. Most mosques are not open to the general female public, but are very accessible to the male

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[13] Aleppo and, notably, Hama were not open cities in the early 1980s when they were beleaguered by special army units trying to root out the Muslim Brotherhood and other opposition groups. The scars inflicted on most Syrians and most Aleppians by the repressive policies of the state are by no means healed.

public. Aleppo Christians do not visit mosques, except as tourists, and very few Muslim Aleppians have ever visited a church. The public-ness or the private-ness of place is relative to who uses it and for what purpose. Aleppo is a spatially complexly differentiated city where gender, age, class (or occupation) and ethnic and religious affiliations have an important bearing on who moves where and why, and who stops where and why. The most differentiated city is that between men and women. Male and female Aleppo are almost two different cities. It is 'right' for men to publicly appear in most parts of the city. Their presence in streets, parks or public buildings is seldom questioned, while women typically need a purpose to appear in public. But Aleppo space is not gendered in any uniform way. Women orient their use of space or signal this orientation according to the boundaries of propriety set by the ethnic or religious group they are, or want to be, identified with, or the stratum/class they identify with, or aspire to. Among Arab Muslims, for example, pre-puberty girls and older women can be much more mobile than young women. Young unveiled girls are sent on errands in the quarter. Older women control their time more than women of child-bearing age. Poor women and highly educated (and sometimes rich) women are more mobile than others. Highly educated women can move around the city for job or professional purposes. Kurdish women move around the city more than Arab Muslim women, due partly to poverty, but also to differing notions of gendered space. The 'ethnic composition' of public space in Aleppo is thus both complex and dynamic. While Aleppo can be characterized as a divided city, it is important to underline that class and the rural-urban division in many ways cross-cut religious and ethnic affiliations.

### Discourses on Equality and Difference

On an overarching level, my informants in Aleppo all stress the unity of mankind beyond cultural, religious and ethnic affiliations and particularities. All are equally human and equally created by God. Many also act on this conviction in their daily lives. People display urbanity—or the lack of it—in daily encounters in traffic, queues, in shops, or public offices. The enactment of this civic and civil (or uncivil) unity is quite in line with the official ideology and Constitution of Syria, according to which all citizens are equal. Religious and ethnic affiliation is not officially recorded in Syria and does not appear on identity-cards, passports or in demographic statistics. The exception, as mentioned, is the requirement that the Syrian

president be a Muslim. All my Aleppo informants laud this official unity and equality beyond particularism, and claim that it is important that the stability and unity of Syria are preserved. The history of the bloody conflict in Syria in the late 1970s and early 1980, and the developments in Lebanon and Iraq serve as frightening examples to my informants (cf. Shami 2009: 153). While some claim that these foreign examples help a corrupt, unrepresentative and 'ethnic' regime to stay in power, they would still not wish upon themselves the situation of their neighbours. And when the regime simultaneously lauds the unity of Syria and its religiously (but not ethnically) varied population, most of my informants do the same. "Here Muslims and Christians live side by side" and "Here Muslims and Christians respect one another" are typical statements in Aleppo (and in Syria in general).

Cultural or historical associations and societies in Aleppo illustrate such unity and conviviality. They are allowed to exist to the extent that they do not make overt political or economic claims on behalf of their members. They are even appreciated when, and if, their purpose is to glorify and stress the rich cultural heritage of Syria. Many in Aleppo with heritage interests are members of the Archeological Society of Aleppo. This society, established in 1924 by Kamel al-Ghazi, a well-known Aleppo historian, is one of Syria's oldest non-governmental organizations. Lectures and seminars on historical, archeological, and cultural topics are given almost every week at its headquarters. The society also arranges popular guided field trips to various parts of old Aleppo, as well as to other parts of Syria and to neighbouring countries. The society is one of the few formal organizations in Aleppo which attracts both Muslim and Christian members. During Ramadan, for example, it always sponsors a breakfast for members where both a sheikh and a priest will talk about peaceful co-existence and good neighbourliness between Christians and Muslims. All my Aleppo informants knew of the society and held it in high regard. Other organizations, or civil society initiatives, will often be talked about as being 'owned' by particular individuals, or as too closely connected to the regime. This kind of suspicion leads to a passivity for public concerns.

Ideals of national unity, essential similarities or enriching varieties and differences do not, however, preclude informants from simultaneously slotting citizens into a number of scales of rank and distinction. In Aleppo (as elsewhere in Syria) people are keen classifiers of themselves and others. They are able to assess the background of others already at the first encounter. With some information on family origins, for example, the discerning Aleppian can quickly gauge significant facts about who a

person 'is' and how one can, or should, relate to this person. And although all citizens are equal, and feel themselves to be equal to one another, on one level, they do not talk about religious and ethnic differences in equal ways. Not surprisingly, minorities often form 'alliances' against the Arab Sunni Muslim majority. The ascent of the Ba'th party can be said to be due to such alliances.

In Aleppo, Kurds occupy the bottom rung of the hierarchical cultural ladder. Some non-Kurds also claim that Kurdish nationalist aspirations are or could develop into a threat against the unity of Syria. But although the vocabulary against Kurds in general is quite demeaning, individual Kurds can be equally admired. There are rich or landowning Kurds in Aleppo with 'good names' recognized by all. There are religious leaders admired for their integrity. Many of my Christian informants have Kurdish friends and vice-versa. In Aleppo certain neighbourhoods are dominated by Kurds, interspersed with Christians, as mentioned above. Many of these Christians are members of the Syrian Orthodox or 'Assyrian' Churches and originate in the so called Jazeera in northeast Syria. With the Aleppo Armenians they share a history of persecution in the early twentieth century, the Armenians often directly at the hands of Kurds.[14] But this is not the history which is remembered or put to use in these quarters or in the Kurdish-Christian friendships. This could be explained by the fact that most of the Kurds in these quarters are not from the northeast but from the Afriin district close to Aleppo. In intra-Kurdish narratives about self and others, differences between Jazeera and Afriin Kurds are sometimes stressed. The former are (by the latter) said to be more 'brutal'. They have a nomadic and roaming past and are less educated, while the Afriin Kurds are said to be rooted in their villages, more gender equal, and more educated. I have heard wealthy Jazeera Kurds talk about Afriin Kurds as 'stupid and poor but loyal and kind-hearted'. But I do not think that these intra-Kurdish differences are relevant for the Christian-Kurdish conviviality in Aleppo. Rather it is the fact that both are part of minorities with similar social habits that makes living close to each other quite common. There are many neighbourhoods where poor Kurds could live with poor Arab Muslims. But Kurds often claim that they do not feel comfortable among the gender-segregating

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[14] The history of these persecutions and the various Christian churches in theses borderlands is exceedingly complex and contested and outside the scope of this article. For succinct introduction to these issues see Björklund (1981: 15–48).

Sunni Arabs of Aleppo.[15] Although most Kurds are Sunni Muslims, they are typically classified—and classify themselves—into an ethnic rather than a religious slot. But the complex relationship between Kurds—an 'ethnic minority' and Christians—a 'religious minority'—underlines the interdependency of these two classificatory principles and how they feed into each other in the particular location of Aleppo.

## *Discourses on the Faith of Self and Others*

Muslims constitute the vast majority of Aleppo inhabitants. Compared with many other Syrian cities, religion is commonly felt to play a large part in daily life of its inhabitants. Most of my Sunni Arab Muslim informants claim that they are 'traditional and conservative' and that this is due to their 'fear of God'. Christians in general were often referred to as 'our Christian brothers' in a warm and slightly paternalistic way, indicating a Muslim obligation to safeguard the 'Peoples of the book'. Aleppo Arab Muslims know that they dominate the city socially, culturally and economically. Some male informants who worked in business and trade had Christian partners. Many stressed that Christians are good to work with because "they are more honest than Muslims." But the commonality with Christians did not make these informants talk of the two religions as equal. While they stated that each believer must hold on to their particular religion, they also stressed that Islam was the most complete religion. In the last few years the religiously interested and concerned Sunni Muslim informants in Aleppo (and elsewhere) have developed anti-Shi'a narratives. At the same time these informants may extol the national and military virtues of Hizbollah in Lebanon. While many of my Muslim informants have tried to engage me in discussions on comparative religion (e.g. Jesus of the Bible compared to 'Isa of the Qur'an) or the theological differences between various Christian Churches (e.g. the Swedish Lutheran creed versus the Greek Orthodox) not one of my Christian informants has tried to do so. Some Christians voice the opinion that their religious devotion is different from that of Muslims. Butrus, a middle aged businessman explained:

> When I studied at university many of my Muslim friends were politically and socially radical. But now they have all become devout Muslims. They pray,

> they fast, and they lock their women in. For us it is different. Even if we are
> no longer politically radical, we cannot become religious that way. For us
> faith is more on the inside ... Actually Christians believe less, I think.

On the one hand, thus, Aleppo Christians express that Muslims are their
brothers. But, on the other hand, most of my informants also expressed
strong feelings of being under threat, and fears about constituting a numeri-
cally decreasing religious minority. I have never heard a Muslim talk about
Christians with hostility or anger, but I have heard the reverse on many
occasions. Christians commonly lament that they, as mentioned, marry too
late, have too few children, and migrate to a higher degree than Muslims.
One Christian man, who had been a public employee until retirement
and now worked in trade, often discussed what he felt to be the underde-
velopment of Syria. He claimed that his countrymen constantly blamed
non-Syrians for their own faults. Furthermore, he emphasized that the
Muslim majority lacked a scientific attitude to life, and instead based all
their arguments on religion and tradition. Like other Christians in Aleppo,
he associated himself with modernity and development, and saw his own
lifestyle as much more cultured than that of the majority. A Christian
elderly lady with a long professional career complained about the bishop
of her Church. He was well-known among the city's Christians as a cultured
person, and one who was an excellent spokesperson for his flock. He also
frequently took part in various gatherings devoted to inter-faith dialogue.
This lady claimed that meeting the Mufti of Syria (who is from Aleppo and
with an image as a 'liberal' and anti-fundamentalist)

> and talking about co-existence and mutual interests is not leading us any-
> where ... I don't believe in this dialogue. Look at our streets. With all these
> veiled women, we, Christians, no longer feel at home. We are moving back-
> ward instead of forward. What is there to have a dialogue about?

### *Discourses on Gender Differences*

Among Aleppo inhabitants, there are various—but in many ways also over-
lapping—categorizations of others, based on religion, ethnicity, language,
perceptions of family and origin. In all of them, however, gender relations
constitute an organizing principle for exclusion and inclusion. This can be
understood in terms of the plurality of Syria's so-called personal status law.
As described above, all citizens as citizens are equal in the Syrian Constitu-
tion. Citizens, however, have to have a religious affiliation in order to marry
and have children. Religious affiliation (and Syrian citizenship) is inherited

from one's father. The State thus organizes its population into separate cat-
egories and does so in a gendered way. This legal ordering and separation
can, of course be seen as inherited from the *millet*s of the Ottoman Empire,
where non-Muslim communities were both protected and separated from
the Muslim majority. In Syria today there is a 'state' personal status law
which in its totality covers all citizens classified as Muslims (Sunni, and
various Shiʿa, including Alawis)[16] and from which the Syrian Druzes, Jews,
and Christians are partially exempted. They instead have their own courts
regulating betrothal, marriage and dissolution of marriage. The Christian
sects recognized by the State and with their own separate courts are the
Greek Orthodox, the Syrian Orthodox, the Armenian Orthodox, the various
Catholic Churches,[17] and the Protestants. The Christian courts are religious
courts dominated by clergy.[18] There is considerable debate among Chris-
tians concerning their religious courts.[19] The courts ensure the survival
of Christians from generation to generation, since they have to marry in
church as Christians in order to have their marriage (and their children)
recognized by the State. At the same time, many Christians are critical of
the way the clergy run these courts.

My Christian informants in Aleppo also often underlined the basic legal
asymmetry between themselves and their Muslim compatriots. By Syrian
law Muslim men are religiously permitted to marry Christian women, but a
Christian man has to convert to Islam to marry a Muslim woman. A Chris-
tian woman marrying a Muslim may retain her religion but will not inherit
her husband. The children—who automatically are regarded as Muslims—
will not inherit their mother. Intermarriages between Aleppo Muslims
and Christians are very rare but a number of my Muslim informants had
married foreign non-Muslim women whom they had met when studying
abroad. Most of these women have converted to Islam.

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[16]  The Syrian personal status law is a codification from mainly Hanafi rulings. But influ-
ence of the Code Napoleon is also discernible. For more detailed analysis of the Syrian
'family law' see Rabo (2005a: 71–87).

[17]  The Catholics/followers of Rome are divided into the Greek Catholics (Melkites), Syr-
ian Catholics, Roman Catholics (called *latiyin* in Arabic), Armenian Catholics, Chaldeans,
and Maronites. All these Churches are present in Aleppo, and they have organized them-
selves into a common religious court. The Greek Catholics are the largest Christian parish
in Aleppo, but in Syria in general it is the Greek Orthodox who dominate. This causes a
certain friction in Aleppo.

[18]  The state courts for personal status issues are called 'shariʿa, courts' but their judges
have a 'secular' legal training with no instruction in the classical jurisprudence.

[19]  For more detailed discussion about such debates among Christians see Rabo (2011).

What issues become crucial when a Syrian Christian woman marries a Syrian Muslim? Jeanette is a native of a small Syrian town; she moved to Aleppo to study and work more than two decades ago. She met and fell in love with a Muslim, and they decided to marry. When I got to know Jeanette, her children were still fairly small. She admitted that it would have been better to marry a man with the same religion, but she was still hopeful that Syria would open up to more marriages of her kind. At that time the most important issue for her was that her children would learn to love and respect the families of both parents.

> I have not become a Muslim because I love my parents and a conversion would mean that I negated my own past and my own roots. My husband and I try to bring up our children to have respect for all people.

But a few years ago this kind of respect was bringing problems to one of her children. "Things are getting much worse here," she said, and told me that her eldest son had had a clash in school with his teacher of religious education. This is a subject which depends on the religious affiliation of the pupil. Muslim children have instruction in Islam, and Christian children have instruction in Christianity.

> My son was told by his teacher that a Muslim who dies as a martyr for his religion will go straight to Paradise. My son then asked where a Christian martyr will go and the teacher answered him: "To hell". The State does not like to have bigoted persons as teachers, but these attitudes are increasing in schools. My son felt terrible.

Jeanette further told me that also her daughter, who studies engineering, was having a tough time at university.

> There are sixty young women in her class. All but eight cover their hair in quite an Islamic fashion. Two of those are Kurdish girls, two have foreign mothers, one is a Christian and then there is my daughter. Everybody knows about her background.

She concluded by saying that also her husband is criticized by people who hint that he has betrayed 'his own people' by marrying a Christian and by letting her remain Christian. "This is becoming a strain on our marriage."

Marriages across the religious divide are rare in today's Aleppo. But when Christians talk about such unions, their inferior legal position is highlighted. Many male Aleppo Christians told me that they feel disadvantaged compared to Muslim men. Christians do not practise the same kind of gender separation as has become typical in Aleppo public life. "Young Muslim men visit our quarters and stare at and bother our unveiled women, while we

cannot do the same," one informant said. Another told me that friendships between Muslim and Christian men are never fully reciprocal nowadays: "When we have Muslim friends we take them home to meet our mothers and sisters, but we never get to meet their female relatives."

### Majority-Minority Imbalances

The following stands out in Aleppo: for inhabitants with a 'minority' affiliation, the Muslim/Arab 'majority' (and those who do not talk of themselves as conservative, traditional, and deeply religious) is extremely significant. This 'majority' constitutes a mirror for reflection. People with 'minority affiliation' can claim that 'we are not as religious as they are', or 'we are more rational and scientific than they are', or 'we don't oppress our women the way they do'. For the 'majority' the 'minorities' are also significant but in a totally different way. In discussions of morality, ethics and gender relations. the minorities are neither invoked nor mirrored. The continued presence of 'minorities' is instead a source of self-gratification for the 'majority'. Their continued presence in Aleppo reaffirms the Islamic openness and acceptance of others, different from oneself. At the same time it is important to stress and reconfirm, as stated above, that although the religious/ethnic affiliation of an individual is very important in Aleppo daily life, they are not 'totalizing' identifications in each and every encounter.

Amira, a Christian woman, wanted me to get to know all her close friends at work; they included people with very varied ethnic and religious backgrounds. Her family has strong ties to Aleppo but comes from the Jazeera. There I have heard Amira's relatives express great anxiety over the increased presence of Kurds in that area in comparison to what they felt to be the decrease of Christians. But Christians' anxiety over Muslim presence is highly contextual. The family demolished their house in Aleppo because they wanted to build a larger one, and Amira needed to be close to the building-site. A devoted and veiled Muslim elderly woman across the street took her in and gave her a room. Amira told me that her family felt very secure and comfortable about her staying with this woman and sharing her kitchen and bathroom. The two families have been neighbours for a long time and the married sons of the elderly lady also live in the same house. In this case I think the religiosity of the Muslim woman and her whole family was an asset for Amira's family. People who are religious in the 'correct' way can be counted on to have high morals. And obviously the 'correct' way includes tolerance towards persons of other faiths.

In the last two decades an increasing social and religious conservatism, outwardly expressed in gender segregation and veiling, has been noticeable in most Syrian cities, particularly Aleppo and Hama. The public behaviour of 'the Sunni majority' has affected others as well. Some informants see this as a consequence of the political convulsions in Syria of the late 1970s and early 1980s, when the Muslim Brotherhood was crushed as a political force but where 'non-political Islam' was later allowed to flourish, as briefly mentioned above. Other informants link the growing public gender segregation and the lack of critical public debates on religion to political trends in the region as a whole, and even globally. In Damascus, however, this conservatism is not as publicly dominant as in Aleppo.

There is an often rather friendly competition between Damascenes and Aleppians. They compete over which city has the longest history of continuous human habitation, or which city contributes more to the economic development of the country. And when discussing religion, gender and ethnic relations in Syria, and the interrelationship between gender, ethnic and religious categorizations, many of my informants—Arabs, Armenians and Kurds, Muslims and Christians—typically stress that Aleppo differ from Damascus. The capital, they said, is a city of bureaucrats and employees where everybody has moved in from somewhere else; there are thus few original Damascenes in Damascus. In such a city, nobody knows the family of others and nobody cares about the origin, behaviour, or religion of others. Aleppo is different, they concur, contributing to the conservative atmosphere in the city. Many of my friends and informants in Damascus agree with this analysis and bless the fact that they live in the capital. "This is the only city in Syria worth living in". They say that in Aleppo people are very hemmed in by their religious and ethnic affiliations and that there is a general lack of common public life. "Aleppo Christians are very socially conservative, just like Aleppo Muslims", a female Christian high government employee insisted. "Aleppo people—Muslims and Christians alike— only think about money. It is a merchant city", a Damascene Muslim man emphatically stated. In the opinion of many Damascenes, Aleppo is a parochial city, while the capital could be classified as more open and even cosmopolitan.

## Cosmopolitanism From Above and From Below

" 'Cosmopolitanism', along with 'empire' and 'globalization' ", as noted by Seyla Benhabib, "has become one of the keywords of our times" (2006: 17). She,

and others, stress that in its modern usage *cosmopolitanism* is indebted to Immanuel Kant and his idea of the *die vollkommene bürgerliche Vereinigung in der Menschengattung* (cf. Bauman 2006: 33) and *Weltbürgerrecht* (Benhabib 2006: 21)—the right of the world citizen, or the cosmopolitan right, based on the duty of hospitality. This hospitality is a right for all human beings and thus, in Hannah Arendt's term, the basis for *a right to have rights* (1973: 296). But *cosmopolitan* is also a rather vague term and "used in a range of overlapping but not always coinciding meanings" (Zubaida 1999: 15). Is the concept at all useful in the social sciences today?[20]

Anthropologists Nigel Rapport and Ronald Stade debate whether *cosmopolitanism* sheds new light on contemporary phenomena or if concepts like multiculturalism, hybridity and the like are sufficient. Nigel Rapport argues that *cosmopolitanism* "usefully identifies a certain anthropological agenda" (2007: 223) which stresses the unity of humankind above and beyond cultural particularities. He uses the figure of Everyone, "a universal figure in possession of general capabilities and liabilities which are lived out in particular sociocultural settings" (2007: 224). Ronald Stade, while endorsing this idea in principle, underlines that the cosmopolitan in anthropology ought to be delineated more sharply. For anthropologists cosmopolitanism may be a research method; that is an open way to approach our objects of study, or an object of study. In the latter case the focus of research can either be on cosmopolitanism as an ideology or on cosmopolitans as a social group (2007: 227). Rapport, commenting on Stade's arguments, concurs that it is important to make a distinction "between cosmopolitanism as an everyday practice and cosmopolitanism as a social-scientific ethos" (2007: 230).

This position is in line with Asef Bayat who argues that in the Middle East cooperation and sharing across religious and ethnic divides is as important features as conflicts. He defines *everyday cosmopolitanism* as

> the idea and practice of transcending self . . . to associate with agonistic others in everyday life. It describes the ways in which the ordinary members of different ethno-religious and cultural groupings mix, mingle, intensely interact, and share in values and practices . . . (2008: 5).

These practices can, I think, be called *cosmopolitanism from below* in contrast to a kind of *cosmopolitanism from above* (cf. Hannerz 2005: 202)

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[20] See Hannerz (2004) for a discussion on why cosmopolitanism is a very useful concept and how it has, and can be put to use in social anthropology.

where cosmopolitanism is an ideology propagated by a powerful elite (cf. Yerasimos 1999: 39). Following Bayat we do find instances of cosmopolitanism from below in Aleppo. There are Aleppians who constantly reiterate they oppose any kind of religious and/or ethnic division of citizens and underline that this is part of a deep-rooted conviction. During a friendly and relaxed get-together in Aleppo between three professional women of different minority backgrounds, one of them complained about the position and treatment of minorities. One of the others immediately responded in a loud voice:

> I hate the word *minority*. Where does it come from? We don't have minorities in Syria. We are all *Syrians*. The transformation of 'Syria' to 'the Syrian Arab Republic' was very wrong. Syrians are not Arabs. The Arabs arrived here quite late, when Christians and others of various origins were already here. The great thing with Syria is that all these people with different origins live side by side. You find everything here. We have the richest history in the world. We are an example for the world. We have no problem with each other. It is the state which has created these problems.

In her reaction to the concept of 'minority' this woman underlines that ethnic and religious differences can be part of an overarching Syrian sameness. This is the politics of recognition (cf. Taylor 1994) in everyday life.

'Cosmopolitanism from below' is, however, not easy to exactly pinpoint and delineate. How much interaction and sharing is needed for us to identify cosmopolitanism as an *everyday* practice? On what scale and with what scope do people have to endorse interaction and sharing for them to be classified as cosmopolitan? Is consistency needed in the way individuals talk and act, or in the way representatives of various groups talk and act? It is, for example, equally possible to classify Aleppo as a city greatly lacking in cosmopolitanism. Take the following example where a middle-aged Christian man in Aleppo tells me that the attitude of his son dismays him.

> He expresses great dislike of Muslims and claims that he cannot stand living in this country ... Well, it is not Muslims as such he hates but the 'fundamentalists'. I am worried. I have many very close Muslim friends. Where are we heading?

### Everyday Conviviality in Aleppo

In Syria cosmopolitanism (in the sense of recognition and appreciation of otherness) 'from above and below' interacts in an interesting and

paradoxical way. There is an official ideology of inclusion and equality between citizens with different religions. Although the doctrine of the Ba'th party with its 'eternal message' in many ways privileges the 'Arab nation' (with its varied population), it simultaneously acknowledges that this particular nation is also one of many. From an Islamic point of view it is possible to argue that the variety and difference of people on earth is part of God's larger scheme. In the Qur'an (49: 13) it is said that people were divided into nations and tribes so that they "might get to know one another." This line was quoted now and then by my Muslim informants. In a seminal article on cosmopolitans and locals Ulf Hannerz argues that "the perspective of the cosmopolitan must entail relationships to a plurality of cultures understood as distinctive entities" (1990: 239). From this point of view Aleppians as well as representatives of the State and the ruling party are all cosmopolitans. Those resisting the practice of the State—rather than its ideals—do not deny the *sui generis* existence of distinct and various Aleppo cultures. Instead they typically claim that in an ideal world such distinctions will disappear. And as shown above, all my Aleppo informants in principle endorse the coexistence and presence of religious, ethnic, and linguistic variety in their city. But in the actual practice of this co-existence, the 'minorities' express that they often feel less than equal to the 'majority'. Marriage across the religious divide could be seen as an important indicator of cosmopolitanism. But this is discouraged both from above and from below. It is discouraged from above because it goes against the logic of official bureaucratic classifications. And it is discouraged from below by the religious minorities because it is perceived to be a threat to their survival.

The Syrian State, as explained above, simultaneously orders and organizes its citizens in an equal and unequal manner. This affects people in Aleppo in different ways, and they interpret this ordering in highly diverse manners, as I have argued. Yet, Aleppians (and other Syrians) find it very hard to resist this ordering in an open, civil, and public manner because they do not have the tools to do so.

There is, for example, no civic education in Syrian schools where all pupils are taught something about the diversity of the country. Most Muslim children, for example, know of Christianity only from an Islamic point of view. Christians know much more about Islam because they are exposed to Islam and expressions of Muslim-ness in public life. But it is also important to underline that all Muslims are not treated equally in the educational system. Shi'a Muslims—including Alawis—and Druzes have no place in the instruction in schools. The ethnic and religious varia-

tion of the country is totally silenced in the curricula of history, national education, and geography. Officially it is argued that, by ignoring 'divisive elements' in the public sphere, the unity of the country is retained. But in this way schools do not provide means to teach pupils how to critically reflect on themselves and others, nor how such classifications may shift contextually. From this point of view there is no cosmopolitanism from above in Syria.

In Aleppo (and Syria) we find that reflexion on, and resistance against, the state ideology and its practice are carried out subversively. Resistance from 'Arab Muslims' may be based on the conviction that the State itself represents a minority (and typically an ungodly one at that). On the other hand resistance may also be based on the conviction that the practice of the State actually exacerbates ethnic and religious divisions in the country. 'Cosmopolitanism from below' implies that there is a non-cosmopolitanism from above to which people react in the form of a counter-culture. This is certainly not the case in Aleppo. Hence *cosmopolitanism* is not such a fruitful concept when it comes to discussing and interpreting the everyday civility and co-existence we actually do find in Aleppo. *Conviviality*, I would argue, captures more closely this everyday living together. The idea of conviviality does not exclude the presence of conflicts, expressed both discursively and in practical action. Paul Gilroy, with a concern over postcolonial cities different from Aleppo, writes that conviviality "does not describe the absence of racism or the triumph of tolerance" but he hopes that "an interest in conviviality will take off from the point where 'multiculturalism' broke down" (2004: xi).[21] Conviviality is, I argue, a fruitful concept to interpret everyday civility and co-existence also in Aleppo. People do not have to love one another but must accept that they share certain spaces. Conviviality can be understood as aspects of the way people, unencumbered by 'cosmopolitanism from above', can organize their local communities when left in peace. But, as I have suggested in the case of Aleppo, it is equally plausible to interpret conviviality—i.e. everyday civility and co-existence—as both part of, and as resistance against, one-sided ideologies.

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[21] *Multiculturalism* is not used in Syria—neither as a descriptive nor as a normative concept. It is, however, striking that the British colonial and postcolonial political categorization and organization of 'ethnic', 'racial' or religious 'groups' bear a strong resemblance to the organization of *millets* in the late Ottoman Empire.

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CHAPTER SIX

FREEDOM OF RELIGION IN SUDAN

Anne Sofie Roald

*Introduction*

The multiplicity of ethnic and religious communities has created divisions in the social setting in Sudan.[1] The present social tension is first and foremost portrayed in religious terms; there is an assumption that the Muslim-Christian division is the main cause of instability and that the basic line of demarcation goes between followers of these two religions. Moreover, Christians in Sudan are often depicted as the weaker part, and there is a tendency to single the 'Southerners' out as *the* Sudanese Christians par excellence. In February 2007, I conducted a fieldwork in Khartoum together with a colleague; the task consisted in interviewing Muslim and Christian leaders, as well as western representatives, particularly from Christian organisations responsible for aid programs among Christians in Khartoum and in Southern Sudan (Tønnessen and Roald 2007).[2] Contrary to the claim of the Christian-Muslim *religious* opposition, our findings point to cultural differences between the mainly urbanised population in Northern Sudan and the mainly rural population in the South, as well as those between the Africanised South and the Arabised North, as important reasons for the social tensions. In both cases, the differences are unrelated to religious affiliation. A third reason is the variation in religious practices among Christians coming from the South and the long-established Christian communities in the North: the Sudanese Copts and the European and Middle Eastern Christians.

All the Sudanese constitutions after independence in 1956 have taken religious differences in Sudan into consideration. Even the 1998 Constitution,

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[1] This article is part of the research project *Moderation of Islamists Movements* at the Chr. Michelsen Institute, Bergen, Norway, funded by the Norwegian Research Council.

[2] The following is built on a fieldwork conducted by myself and Liv Tønnessen in Khartoum in February 2007 (see Tønnessen and Roald 2007). This study deals thus with the situation before the partition of Sudan into Sudan and Southern Sudan. 'Sudan' in this article therefore refers mainly to Sudan before the partition.

which was designed by the Islamist ideologue, Hasan al-Turabi, at the time
Speaker of the National Assembly and a close ally to the President Umar
al-Bashir, uses the term *religiousness* rather than *Islam*, in an attempt to
avoid stirring tensions between religious groups. Because Sudan ratified
the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR [1966])
in 1986, the regime which came to power in 1989 was committed to grant
citizens freedom of religion. Article 18 in the Covenant states:

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and
   religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion
   or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community
   with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in
   worship, observance, practice and teaching.
2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to
   have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.
3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to
   such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect
   public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and
   freedoms of others.[3]

This chapter explores the topic of freedom of religion according to the
UN conventions. The focus is directed at how various religious communi-
ties in Khartoum perceive and assess the way their freedom of religion is
guaranteed in the State of Sudan.

### The Coming of Monotheistic Religions

Both Christianity and Islam were introduced into the region in the sixth
and seventh centuries (Holt and Daly 2000). At the time of the Ottoman-
Egyptian invasion in 1820 the Northern part of the country was Arabized
and Islamized, and during their reign (1820–1881) Middle Eastern Catholics
started to settle in Northern Sudan, establishing small Christian minority
Churches in the then mainly Muslim area (Holt and Daly 2000: 22–37).
Although the Ottoman-Egyptian rulers never controlled Southern Sudan, it
was formally included in the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, British mission-
aries entered Southern Sudan from the South of the region and converted

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[3] "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights" at http://www2.ohchr.org/
english/law/ccpr.htm.

many tribes to Christianity in the late nineteenth century. The Mahdists (1881–98), meanwhile, made a great effort to Islamize the South of Sudan (Fluehr-Lobban 1991: 76), and, judging from the large Southern Sudanese Muslim community, this effort has been successful. Although the British-Egyptian administration controlled the whole of today's Sudan, they treated the North and the South as two different regions. The British planned to add the South of Sudan to the British East African colonies, and in 1922 the Closed District Ordinance was passed, requiring permits for travelling between the North and the South. The division between the two parts was reinforced by allowing Christian missionaries to work in the South, whereas Islamic mission was strictly forbidden in this area. At the same time, the British neglected the development of the South and focused on the strengthening of administration in the North (Fluehr-Lobban 1991: 77–79; Rolandsen 2005: 24; Nyang and Johnston 2003). As the time for self-rule approached, however, the British decided to integrate the two parts (Nyang and Johnston 2003). From 1948 the whole of today's Sudan came under one administration. Arabic was the administrative language in the North, and English in the South. The Southerners could not participate in the political process for lack of proper Arabic knowledge. The Southerners' marginal position in central governing institutions, combined with their historical separation from the North, did not support Sudanese nationalist sentiment in the South, and by the time of Independence the civil war had already begun (Nyang and Johnston 2003).

*Religious Communities*

Sudan is a multi-religious, multiethnic and multilingual country. Tribalism is an important feature of social life on the micro- as well as the macro-level.[4] Besides the distinction along religious lines, most Sudanese also distinguish between affiliation to African and Arab cultural traditions. Estimates of adherents to the various religious groups in the whole of Sudan vary in the different sources; Muslims are estimated to represent between 50 and 70 percent, adherents to African tribal religions between 25 and 35 percent and Christians between 4 to 15 percent.[5]

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[4]  http://lexicorient.com/e.o/sudan_4.htm
[5]  http://lexicorient.com/e.o/sudan_4.htm At US government webpage for instance, the figures of Christians are given as 5% in 2004 (www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrtp/2004/41628 .htm).

It is generally estimated[6] that before Numeiri's introduction of the shari'a in 1983, there were approximately 400,000 Christians in Khartoum; the Copts and other Orthodox were the largest communities, followed by the Catholics and the Anglicans. The Northern Christian groups have decreased considerably after 1983. The Coptic community has, for instance, nearly dimidiated, according to a representative from the Coptic Church.[7] The Greek-Orthodox community, which had approximately 12–15 thousand members before 1983, is now reduced to a couple of hundred individuals.[8] However, many of the displaced persons living in camps on the outskirts of Khartoum are Christians, and it is commonly agreed that before the partition in 2011 there were approximately 4 million Christians in the North. The Christians thus constituted nearly 20 percent of the 22 million inhabitants in the Northern states of Sudan at the time.[9]

Historically speaking, Sudanese Islam was influenced by Sufism. Moreover, nearly all Muslims today belong to the Sunni branch of Islam.[10] Within the Christian minority in the North today, the Roman Catholic Church is the largest congregation, followed by the Episcopal Church.[11] Various Orthodox Churches, such as the Coptic, the Ethiopian and the Greek-Orthodox, and various Protestant Churches, such as the Presbyterian and the Pentecostal, are also present. The African traditional religions are mainly practiced in Southern Sudan, but due to the war, traditional beliefs are now also common in areas of displaced persons in Khartoum. Although traditional religious faiths, most of which are non-scriptural, differ between the various ethnic groups, there are common traits, such as worship of ancestor spirits and belief in a supreme God (Ray 1976).[12]

In Sudan the *millet* or rather the *neo-millet* system (see van den Boogert in this volume) in personal status matters re-emerged through the Non-Muhammadan Marriage Ordinance in 1906 (Tier n.d.: 4). Even after the British gained control of Sudan in 1899, two sets of courts were in function;

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[6] Personal communication with Christian and Muslim leaders.

[7] Interview with Father Antonius, Deputy Bishop in the Coptic Orthodox Church in Omdurman, February 25, 2007.

[8] Interview with a member of the Greek-Orthodox community in Khartoum in the 25th of February 2007.

[9] U.S. Department of State "Background: Sudan". See www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5424 .htm.

[10] According to the *Encyclopaedia of the Orient* there might be a small minority of Shi'a Muslims in Sudan. See http://lexicorient.com/e.o/sudan_4.htm. However, this possible minority is not mentioned in any statistics.

[11] www.anglicannifcon.org/SudanPF.htm

[12] http://lexicorient.com/e.o/sudan_4.htm

questions related to personal status were dealt with in religious courts, whereas other matters were handled in what the British called the civil law courts (Fluehr-Lobban 1987). In contemporary Sudan, Personal Status legislation is still based on religious and tribal/ethnic affiliations and dealt with by the community leaders. It is important to note that also on the political level individuals compete for positions along tribal/religious lines. Sudan is thus a society where citizenship is constituted through community affiliation and collective rights rather than individual rights. It is interesting to note that the legal advisor to the president, Farida Ibrahim, regarded the *neo-millet* system as the evidence that freedom of religion is highly developed in Sudan.[13]

## Freedom of Religion in Sudan

### The Initial Constitutions

Sudan's first Constitution, with minor amendments, has been in force since independence, but was suspended several times (1956, 1964 and 1985), until the coup d'etat in 1989. It was founded on the ideal of a secular state, with citizenship as the basis for rights and freedoms, and on the prohibition against all discrimination based on religion, ethnic origin or gender (Abdelmoula 1997). Despite this ideal of individual rights, the Personal Status legislation was still placed under religious community authorities. In 1968 a provision was introduced through a constitutional bill making Islam the source of law. Article 113 of the bill states that "Islamic shari'a is the basic source of law in the State".[14] This bill also made Islam the official religion and Arabic the official language of Sudan. And since the bill was introduced as a reaction to the influence of the Communist Party, "propagation of communism and atheism" was outlawed.[15]

When Numeiri introduced his 'Permanent Constitution' in 1973, after his dispute with the Communists in 1971, and despite his close ties with the West, he maintained the 1968 provision. Thus Islamic shari'a remained the source of law and Arabic the official language of Sudan. Sudan continued to "endeavour to express Islam's values".[16] Nevertheless, the Constitution

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[13] Interview with the legal adviser of the President, Farida Ibrahim in Khartoum, 21 February 2007.

[14] www.usip.org/religionpeace/rehr/sudanconf/abdelmoula.html

[15] www.usip.org/religionpeace/rehr/sudanconf/abdelmoula.html

[16] www.usip.org/religionpeace/rehr/sudanconf/abdelmoula.html

does explicitly, albeit vaguely, state that "[d]ivine religions [i.e. Christianity] and honourable spiritual beliefs [i.e. the tribal religious traditions] of the citizens should not be insulted or degraded"; neither should such beliefs be "misused" or politically exploited.[17] It is not clear what is meant by 'values', and the claim of non-discrimination of "honourable spiritual beliefs" is rather vague. The question to pose is which Christian and 'spiritual' beliefs are "honourable" and which are not? In this Constitution, which remained in force for nearly ten years after the coup d'etat in 1989, freedom of religion for all the three main religious communities is explicitly stated along the line of "intolerance towards the intolerants", as stated in Article 16 (e).

### The 1998 'Islamist' Constitution

al-Turabi was the major entrepreneur behind the Constitution that came into force the 1st of July 1998. In this Constitution, the term 'shari'a' (Islamic legislation) is mentioned only once, namely in the chapter on amendments to the Constitution. In this part the fundamentals of the Constitution are stated to be first and foremost Islamic legislation, then the consensus of the people on the basis of their referendum [the Arabic word used is *shura*, which means consultation], or their constitutional law [regulations] or their customs (*urf*) (Constitution of the Republic of Sudan 1998: Article 139: 3a). The word Islam is also mentioned only once, in Article 1, in which it is stated that "Islam is the religion of the majority of the population" and that "Christianity and customary creeds have considerable followers". It is interesting to note how the aspects of 'Islam' and 'Islamic legislation' have been de-emphasised in the 1998 Constitution in comparison with the former Sudanese Constitutions. In contrast, this Constitution accentuates *religiousness*. In Article 18 it is stated that "those in service in the State and public life shall envisage the dedication thereof for the worship of God". Moreover, the same article asserts that "religious motivation" should guide:

> planning, legislation, policies and official business in the political, economic, social and cultural fields in order to prompt public life towards its objectives, and adjust them towards justice and up-rightness to be directed towards the grace of God in the Hereafter.

It is noteworthy that in order to provide a standard Islamic orientation and to prevent deviation from the main Islamic orientation of the state,

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[17] www.usip.org/religionpeace/rehr/sudanconf/abdelmoula.html

Article 18 stipulates specifically that as for the worship of God, "Muslims stick to the Koran and Sunna (Muhammad's normative custom)". The stress in the Constitution on religiosity rather than on Islam is also valid for the presidential office, as there is no requirement for the president to be a Muslim (Article 36). Even in the presidential oath, the dedication to God, is mentioned in neutral religious terms such as 'God the Almighty' (*allah al-azim*) (Article 40), a term also used by Christians in the Arabic language. This feature reflects al-Turabi's suggestion in 2006 that even a Christian can be a president of Sudan.[18] It seems obvious however, that al-Turabi speaks of "a Northern Christian". In our discussion he consistently referred to Christians living in the North, seeing them as 'civilized', in contrast to the 'backward' Christians in the South.[19] This view indicates that the tension between the Arab urban North and the African rural South is better analysed in terms of ethnicity and social development than in terms of religious opposition between Muslims and Christians.

Article 24 in the "al-Turabi" Constitution provides for freedom of religion under the heading "Freedom of creed and worship". It is stated that

> Every human being shall have the right of freedom of conscience (*wijdan*) and religious creed and he [sic] shall have the right to declare his religion or creed, and manifest the same by way of worship, education, practice or performance of rites or ceremonies; and no one shall be coerced to adopt such faith as he does not believe in, nor to practice rites or services he does not voluntarily consent to; and that is without prejudice to the right of choice of religion, injury to the feelings of others, or to public order, all as may be regulated by law.

Indeed, Article 24 adheres to the wording of Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). In this Covenant freedom to *not* have a religion was not explicitly stated. Furthermore, the text in Article 24 in the "al-Turabi" Constitution is fairly similar to Article 18 in the Declaration of Human Rights. However, regarding the possibility of *not* having a religion, an implication of Article 18 in the Declaration of Human Rights,[20] this seems at first glance also to be an option in the 1998 Constitution. The English text in Article 24 might give the impression that

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[18]  http://www.sudantribune.com/Next-Sudan-s-president-could-be.16048
[19]  Discussion with Hasan al-Turabi in Khartoum, February 2007.
[20]  Article 18 on the Declaration of Human Rights states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance".

it is possible "to not believe" or *not* to profess belief in any religion, as the English translation of the Arabic text speaks of freedom of "conscience" (*wijdan*), which implies both the freedom to believe and not to believe.[21] 'Conscience' can, however, also have an explicit religious meaning, as the *wijdan* indicates a link between the individual's inner feeling and this individual's moral values based on religious or moral systems.[22] When Article 24 is read in light of other passages in the "al-Turabi" Constitution, however, it becomes clear that freedom of conscience in the Sudanese context is meant only in relation to religious systems and not to atheistic, agnostic, or non-religious moral worldviews. The Sudanese concept of freedom of religion in this Constitution thus only means freedom *to* religion, not freedom *from* religion.

Another important aspect of Article 24 of the "al-Turabi" Constitution lies in the phrase "all as may be regulated by law". Article 24 does not mention the possibility or the prohibition of converting to another religion or leaving a religious tradition, but the 1991 Criminal Act explicitly prohibits apostasy from Islam, and the punishment for this offence is the death penalty.[23] This prohibition and its punishment contradict Article 18 of the ICCPR which explicitly states that "no one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or a belief of his choice". In this regard the 1998 Constitution, due to its reference to "all as may be regulated by law", is not compatible with the international covenants to which Sudan committed itself when it ratified the ICCPR.

Moreover, also regarding religious freedom for religious minorities in the "al-Turabi" Constitution, there seems to be a problem due to the phrase "all as may be regulated by law". This is because prior to 2005 non-Muslims all over Sudan were obliged to follow the shariʿa law, except in personal status affairs. However, this changed after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005. In this agreement non-Muslims are exempted from being ruled according to Islamic law.[24] The Interim Constitution of 2005, which builds upon the CPA, stipulates also that in the states outside Southern Sudan the sources of legislation are "shariʿa and the consensus of the people", whereas "nationally enacted legislation applicable to Southern Sudan . . . shall have as its sources of legislation popular consensus, the

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[21] *Wijdan* is translated as "conscience". According to Wehr's dictionary, however, *wijdan* means sentiments or emotions. (Wehr 1994: 1231).

[22] For a discussion on conscience (Arabic: *damir*), see Leirvik 2002.

[23] Sudan Department of Justice; Criminal Act Chapter 13: 126.

[24] http://www.iss.co.za/af/profiles/Sudan/darfur/cpaprov.htm

values and the customs of the people of the Sudan, including their traditions and religious beliefs, having regard to the Sudan's diversity".[25]

### Freedom of Religion in Sudan After 2005

According to Farida Ibrahim, the religious minority 'right' of the *neo-millet* system is also extended to the 'traditional religions'. Sudanese Personal Status Law, whether Christian, Muslim or traditional tribal, builds on the patriarchal system of gender inequality. Thus, the legal pluralism in Personal Status Law is not compatible with the Declaration of Human Rights, especially the principle of equality. However, as Sudan is one of the few UN member countries[26] which have not signed the CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations Against Women), it is not particularly bound by the principle of gender equality.

Islamists, both those close to the regime and those with a more critical view of the official policy, claimed that the Muslim majority have surrendered to minority claims inside Sudan as well as to international pressure, and have given up much of their majority privileges after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement came into force in 2005. Quite a few Christians living in Khartoum, on the other hand, contended that many of the shari'a laws apply to Christian citizens despite the Interim Constitution's emphasis on religious minority rights and its claim that shari'a shall not apply to non-Muslims. In particular, it is the shari'a prohibition of alcohol many Christians find offensive. But even non-legal issues, such as difficulties in building churches and marginalization from the public space, such as the representation of Christians in the media, were viewed by many representatives of Christian Churches in Khartoum as restrictions on their freedom of religion.

Since Sudan has ratified the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), I will, in the following, discuss three issues linked to religious freedom for religious minorities in Sudan: restrictions on the building of churches, the prohibition of alcohol, and representation in the public sphere. I will further discuss two restrictions on religious freedom,

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[25] Interim Constitution of Sudan 2005: Article 5.
[26] Iran and Somalia are among the countries which have refused to sign CEDAW. It is interesting to note that, although the United States has signed the treaty, it is one of the few countries which have not ratified CEDAW.

this time regarding the Muslim majority: apostasy and compulsory female dress code.

### Freedom of Religion for non-Muslims

Under the regime led by Umar al-Bashir there have been frequent reports on how Christian women trading in alcohol were jailed in Sudan due to the shariʿa prohibition. Although the 2005 Interim Constitution claims that Islamic law shall not apply to non-Muslims, there are indications that Southern women from various religious denominations continue to be charged and jailed for trading in alcohol after 2005.[27] The trade in alcohol is common among refugee women living in the displaced areas in the outskirt of Khartoum, as many of them are the main breadwinners for large families, and job opportunities are scarce.[28] Besides, the prohibition against the trade in alcohol makes it difficult for Christian Churches to purchase wine for the Holy Communion. Representatives from various Christian denominations complained that even though, in principle, there is no prohibition against non-Muslims drinking alcohol, the Sudanese authorities do not accept any kind of private use of alcohol. This criticism was rejected by Helen Louise Olear, Member of Parliament for the ruling party, the National Congress and a Christian from the South. She claimed that the prohibition of alcohol is not a problem for Christians as they, unlike Muslims, are allowed to drink alcohol in private gatherings. "Before the gathering the Christians have to inform the police, and the drinking of alcohol will be accepted", she claimed, "as it is the trading of alcohol which is forbidden".[29] Olear's contention must be assessed in view of her being a representative of the ruling party. Moreover, she did not mention the practical problem of how to have access to alcoholic beverages if trade is prohibited. And how can Churches perform Holy Communion according to ritual rules if it is impossible to get hold of wine due to the trade prohibition? One of the Christian representatives, however, claimed that some Churches do have wine for ritual purposes, but they have to get hold of the wine illegally, mainly through smuggling. Christian Church leaders

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[27]  See for instance "Sudan jails 'harsh and crowded' ", 30/11–2007, at: http://news.bbc .co.uk/2/hi/africa/7120615.stm.

[28]  Interview with Sabah Muhammad, journalist at the newspaper *al-ayam*, February 26, 2007 in Khartoum. See also articles in the newspaper *al-ayam*: 1 March 2006; 17 May 2006; 31 October 2006; 22 November 2006.

[29]  Interview with Helen Louise Olear, Member of Parliament for the National Congress Party, February 14, 2007 in Khartoum.

thus have to break Sudanese laws in order to fulfill their ritual obligations towards their congregations. There is an obvious contradiction between the Sudanese principle of freedom of religion and the "al-Turabi" Constitution's emphasis on religiosity and the fact that trade in alcohol, even by Christians, is forbidden. Thus in this matter the Sudanese authorities fail to adhere to the principle of freedom of religion stated in the ICCPR.

As for the building of churches, there has been a slight improvement lately. Due to the efforts of the non-governmental organisation SIRC (Sudan inter-relations Council), the Guidance and Endowment Ministry has decided to raise three new churches in Khartoum.[30] The SIRC is an organisation consisting of Muslims and Christians. The Secretary General is at present a Muslim, al-Tayyib Zain al-Abidin, and the vice Secretary General is a Christian. "SIRC tries to protect the non-Muslims, but there is still much to do", Abidin stated. He was critical to the fact that Christians are not given free plots of land to build their churches, whereas Muslims get land for mosques. The government's rationale for this unequal treatment is because it assumes that the presence of the Southern Christian population in Khartoum is temporary; "The authorities therefore see no need to offer possibilities for authorized churches in Khartoum, as most Christians will return to the South", said Abidin.[31] On the other hand, he did not believe that the government deliberately impedes the establishment of unauthorized worship buildings, as some Christians have claimed, saying that many such buildings are situated in the areas of the displaced camps, and these camps are often in unplanned areas. "Khartoum is expanding, and whenever the governmental urban planning office arrives at such an unplanned place in order to start building new houses, they will destroy all unauthorized buildings in the area."[32]

One of the community worker from Europe affiliated to a Western Christian organisation believes Christians are exaggerating the problem of church construction. He questioned the Christians' demand that the state take responsibility for building churches, as in his view Christians should be responsible for raising their own churches. According to him, the state also restricts the building of mosques, particularly those belonging to Muslim groups which the authorities mistrust, for instance the salafi movement,

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[30] Interview with al-Tayyib Zain Abidin in Khartoum, February 11, 2007. Several church leaders confirmed Abidin's claim that it is due to SIRC that the government has accepted to raise the three churches.

[31] Interview with al-Tayyib Zain Abidin in Khartoum, February 11, 2007.

[32] Interview with al-Tayyib Zain Abidin in Khartoum, February 11, 2007.

*Ansar al-Sunna*.[33] Father Antonius, a Coptic priest, is among those who complained about the difficulties of building new churches.[34] Yet, at the same time he claimed that the Coptic community has decreased dramatically since the 1970s. Indeed it is a problem for the Coptic community if the State does not offer economic support for the maintenance of churches. However, the fact that the priest used the argument about 'the building of churches' indicates that he resorted to a discourse common among Christians, even though this is not necessarily a problem within his own specific community. Recently, the authorities allowed the building of three new churches. In view of the discussion above, it seems safe to conclude that, as far as the construction of worship buildings is concerned, Sudan respects the principle of freedom of religion as defined in the ICCPR.

In our discussions with Christians, the lack of media representation for non-Muslims came up as an important aspect of freedom of religion in Sudan. Sister Margareth, a Sudanese Catholic nun with Syrian ancestors, is the vice-chairperson of CAMP (Christians and Muslims for Peace), an organisation which came into being through governmental initiative. She complained that on the national radio and television Christian issues would be aired only one hour a week. "On Sundays", she said, "there is a Christian sermon on the radio, whereas the Islamic call for prayer (*adhan*) is aired both on radio and television five times daily". Moreover, "recitations of the Qur'an and religious Islamic programs are superfluous in the media", she exclaimed. She was further critical to the national educational curriculum which is compulsory for all pupils in order to get a Sudanese exam:

> The government wants to force upon us [the Christians] Islamic education. In the curriculum everything deals with Islam; Islamic history, Islamic geography, and even Islamic maths. They want our children to learn the Koran by heart. What do the Muslims want? Do they give out their holy texts to dogs? We the Christians do not care about the Koran, so we do not venerate this text.[35]

The lack of Christian representation in the national media is by many regarded as a political issue. One of the Muslim informants, a person active in a grass-root peace group, stated that since 1983 Islam has been promoted in national media, and this results in Muslims feeling superior in society and in Christians feeling oppressed. In the matter of public representation,

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[33] Interview with a European Community worker affiliated with a Western Christian organisation, who prefers to be anonymous.

[34] Interview with Father Antonius, Deputy Bishop in the Coptic Orthodox Church in Omdurman Sudan, February 25, 2007.

[35] Interview with Sister Margareth in Khartoum, February 26, 2007.

taking into account the relative number of non-Muslims in Sudan, and unlike in the matter of church construction, the authorities do not seem to respect the principle of freedom of religion contained in the ICCPR.

*Freedom of Religion for Muslims*

The issue of Islamic law and apostasy has been at the centre of worldwide discussions over the last years. The right to change religion is a major theme in the international freedom of religion discourse. As freedom of religion in most secular states has come to mean not only the right *to* religion but also the right to *not* belong to a religion, the apostasy law in countries such as Pakistan and Sudan has gained international attention. In Sudan, conversion from Islam to another religion is forbidden according to the 1992 Criminal Act. In the discussion with Abidin I asked what the SIRC is doing to protect individuals who convert from Islam. He answered:

> In the Constitutions [of 1998 and 2005] there is nothing about apostasy, as both include the principle of religious freedom. Moreover, today apostasy is not an issue. If we raise the issue, a new problem will be created, as theoretically speaking there is a problem [due to the apostasy law in the Criminal Act]. Practically, however, apostasy is not a problem. No one has been punished according to this law. If this happens we will work against it.[36]

According to Abidin, the execution of the politician and scholar Mahmoud Muhammad Taha in 1985 was not a religious but a political decision. Abidin elaborated on his view:

> Taha criticized Numeiri's religious laws, and Numeiri looked for a junior judge to take the case and get him executed. It was not at first about apostasy. Taha refused to appeal, so the Court itself decided to appeal. This procedure in itself is rather uncommon. The appeal was brought to the special court created by Numeiri for Islamic laws, and they changed the charge to apostasy. But, in my view, it was not about apostasy, it was a political issue.[37]

As apostasy is a crime according to Sudanese law, it is obvious that the Sudanese authorities do not keep to the principle stated in ICCPR Article 18: 1, namely that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and that this right includes the freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his/her own choice. However, the text in ICCPR Article 18: 3 is ambiguous. It says:

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[36] Interview with al-Tayyib Zain Abidin in Khartoum, February 11, 2007.
[37] Interview with al-Tayyib Zain Abidin in Khartoum, February 11, 2007.

> Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.[38]

This can be interpreted as saying that limitations prescribed by law are acceptable. One can thus argue that the criminalization of apostasy is acceptable in accordance with the ICCPR. However, if these limitations are read in connection with the last part of the sentence, "to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others", it would be harder to argue that the criminalization of conversion from Islam is compatible with Article 18. In pre-modern states when religious affiliation was an important aspect of power relations, apostasy on a larger scale from the majority religion would affect the balance of power in society. Sudan, however, is a nation-state where membership is based on citizenship rather than religious affiliation, except in the family legislation.[39] The criminalization of apostasy in today's Sudan would thus have to be legitimated in terms of the protection of public security, order, and behavior.

The restriction of freedom to change one's religion is applicable for Muslims only. Christians are, according to Sudanese law, free to embrace Islam or any other religion. Conversion to Islam or Christianity happens all the time among those who belong to traditional tribal religions.[40] However the matter of *not* belonging to a religion seems to be a taboo topic in Sudanese society. When asked about atheists and their rights in this society, Abidin answered that he does not believe there are atheists in Sudan, "at least", he says, "if there are any, they do not declare themselves to be atheists".[41] "Atheists would be afraid to declare to be atheists" as this "will create a bad image for them", Abidin says. The general religious character of the Sudanese people, he believed, will make people shun atheists. "There are no atheists in Sudan. Even the communists believe in God, as in the last Sudanese election in Sudan the communist party's political meetings would start with recitation of the Koran." It is symptomatic that Abidin associated

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[38] "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights" at http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/ccpr.htm.

[39] It is important to be aware that although legally employment in the state is based on citizenship, practically speaking the authorities tend to favour professionals with an Islamist orientation. It is also important to point out that in contrast to other countries with Muslim majorities, the Sudanese Constitution opens up for a non-Muslim being the highest leader (*al-qiyada al-ʿulya*) in the country.

[40] Interview with Church leaders in Khartoum, February 2007.

[41] Interview with al-Tayyib Zain Abidin in Khartoum, February 11, 2007.

atheism particularly with the communist movement, a view common in other parts of the Muslim world as well, including among Christians in this region. In a discussion about how Christian children have to learn about Islam, sister Margareth declared:

> I never teach Muslim children in our school about Christianity. Do we want Sudan to be a communist society? If we teach the children various religious traditions they will end up not believing in anything and become communists.[42]

The tendency to link non-belief and atheism with communism is thus not a specifically Muslim trait; rather it seems to be a phenomenon culturally shared by Christians and Muslims alike. Moreover, the right to *not* belong to a religion is not explicitly mentioned in the Sudanese law; it is only referred to implicitly by linking "freedom of conscience (*wijdan*)" to religious system, as discussed above, and it is obviously socially unacceptable in Sudan to not have a religion.

According to Abidin, apostasy has not been an issue in Sudan. It is, however, hard to overlook the fact that apostasy is a criminal offence according to Sudanese legislation. The question is why there have not been any legal cases against apostasy (if we accept Abidin's notion that the Numeiri-Taha case was political)? Is it because Sudanese Muslims do not convert to other religions? Or, if Sudanese Muslims do convert, do they do this secretly? Whatever the answer to this question, it is obvious that the law of apostasy might at any time be activated, for purely religious reasons or for political reasons.[43] When freedom of religion is defined as the right for individuals to freely choose to embrace or abstain from religion, in Sudan there is no such freedom.

Before the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, the regime made it compulsory for Muslim women to adhere to the female Islamic dress code, with covering of the body and the hair. Non-Muslims were not forced to wear a headscarf, but they were expected to wear "decent" clothing, meaning that the body, but not necessarily the hair, should be well covered. Muslim women I interviewed claimed that, after the CPA, the authorities are less prone than before to punish women who do not follow the strict Islamic dress code. A Muslim woman working in the government stated that before the CPA came into being she would always wear a tight headscarf under her *thawb* (the long piece of cloth

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[42] Interview with Sister Margareth in Khartoum, February 26, 2007.
[43] For a discussion on apostasy see Longva 2002.

Sudanese Muslim women wrap around their bodies and loosely over the head). After 2005 she has, however, often taken off her headscarf; instead her head is loosely covered by part of her *thawb* only. Although to take off the headscarf is not a legal offence, she claims, social control makes it hard for women who want to dress less strictly. She experienced that colleagues and relatives commented on her "loose" clothing style in the beginning, when she took off her headscarf. But the last year, she claims, even social control has decreased in this matter. The story of the 13 women who were arrested for 'indecency' in 2009 for wearing pants indicates, however, that the strict female dress code is not only a matter of social control, but has also legal implications. Of the 13 women 12 accepted their fines and the flogging, whereas one woman, a journalist, went to court. She was spared the 40 lashes but had to pay the fine. This event reinforces the impression that the right *not* to belong to a religion or not to practice a religion is unacceptable in Sudan, and this implies a violation of freedom of religion not compatible with the ICCPR.

In Sudan there are clearly certain restrictions of freedom of religion as defined in the ICCPR's Article 18. The prohibition against trading in alcohol restricts the Christian minority's possibility to perform the religious rituals. Another violation of Art. 18 is the fact that Islamic education is compulsory for Christian children. As for representation in the public space, e.g. in the media, and restrictions in the building of churches, however, it is important to view these issues in a broad comparative perspective. In most western[44] societies the official holidays follow the Christian calendar, despite these states' overt secularism. Nor are Muslim children in many European countries, automatically given permission to attend the weekly Friday prayer, and some would even not get permission at all. We also find certain restrictions against religious buildings, in Scandinavia for instance. As for public representation, all religions have limited representation in the public space, as religion in European countries is supposed to belong to the private sphere. The fact that countries in the West have restrictions on religious freedom similar to those in Sudan does not mean, of course, that these restrictions are not violations of the ICCPR's Article 18. Rather it means that to guarantee freedom of religion for minorities is always problematic, as religion, socio-cultural structures, politics, and power are interlinked. Besides, it is difficult to differentiate 'pure' religious phenomena from social, cultural, and political aspects.

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[44]  I use "western countries" to denote Europe, USA, Australia, and New Zealand.

   It is also obvious from the discussion above that neither the religious minorities nor the Muslims in Sudan enjoy full freedom of religion. The prohibition of conversion from Islam seriously restricts the Muslims' freedom of choice in matters of religion. Thus, there are restrictions on freedom of religion in the State of Sudan for Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

*Religious Freedom in the South?*

The 2005 Interim Constitution of Southern Sudan also refers to religious freedom in the South. Article 8 affirms that religion and state shall be separated in Southern Sudan; all religions shall be treated equally, and religious belief shall not be used for divisive purposes. Abidin claimed, however, that such equal treatment of religious followers in the South does not exist "despite the words on tolerance between religious followers in the Southern Sudan Interim Constitution".[45] He claimed that there have been several cases of violence against Muslims in the South, such as a decree preventing women from wearing a headscarf and the closing down of Zakat institutions in the South.[46] The discrimination of Muslims in the South was unintentionally confirmed by the Christian editor of the newspaper *Khartoum Monitor*, Alfred Taban, himself of Southern origin.[47] When asked about the number of Christians and Muslims in the South, he stated that there are 18 percent Christians and 19 percent Muslims.[48] "However", he goes on, "I believe that after the partition of Sudan the Muslims will be reduced in number. They will be afraid, and they will conceal that they are Muslims, or they will turn away from Islam. The Southerners will treat them badly. The Southerners are so suspicious, and some people [Muslims] might be spies." In his statement it is obvious that he sees 'Southerners' as Christians and people adhering to traditional beliefs. That Muslim Southerners encounter discrimination in the South was further confirmed by a ommunity worker from Europe engaged in Christian-Muslim relations in the South.[49] Thus, violations of Article 18 of the ICCPR take place not only

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[45]  Interview with al-Tayyib Zain Abidin in Khartoum, February 11, 2007.
[46]  Interview with al-Tayyib Zain Abidin in Khartoum, February 11, 2007.
[47]  Interview with Alfred Taban in Khartoum, February 24 2007.
[48]  A European informant, working for a Western organisation confirmed this number, saying that "the Southern Christians and Westerners believe that the Christian community is the biggest in the South. This is probably not true. The Mahdi [in the late nineteenth century] had an aggressive Islamization policy in the South, and I believe there are as many Muslims as Christians".
[49]  Interview with a community worker from Europe affiliated with a Western Christian organisation, who prefers to be anonymous.

at the hands of the Islamic regime in Northern Sudan, but also at those of non-Muslim authorities in the South as well.

*Protection of Non-Muslims in Khartoum*

Article 157 of the Interim Constitution of 2005 deals with the issue of protection of non-Muslim rights in the North. Abidin linked this article to the establishment of the *Commission for Protection of non-Muslims in the National Capital*, of which he is a member, stating that this was a step towards ensuring that the rights of non-Muslims are protected and respected in accordance with the guidelines mentioned in the Constitution. On the 8th of February 2007 the government appointed the Southern Christian, Joshua Dao to head this commission. At first, his appointment was favoured by many Christian intellectuals. Taban, for instance, welcomed Dao's appointment in his February 13th editorial, but after the names of the members of the commission were announced, he wrote a critical editorial about the composition of the commission. He saw the Commission as "a great disservice to non-Muslims", and he called for its dissolution (*Khartoum Monitor* February 17 2007, page 2). His main argument was that there were 15 Muslims and only 13 non-Muslims in the commission. He discussed the Muslim members and claimed that they are "predominantly fundamentalists who would like to see Sudan become an Islamic state." "Thus", he declared, "the so-called rights of non-Muslims which the commission is supposed to protect are actually what the shariʿa law permits."[50] Taban further regarded the appointment of the commission as "a political ploy meant to reassure non-Muslims that they, in theory, are most welcome in their own capital city. In practice, however, the non-Muslims, who by definition do not believe in Islamic laws, have to live according to the Islamic shariʾa law!"[51] Taban added that many of the Muslim members are staunch Islamists. "What is the point?" he exclaimed. "The committee is just a show-off!"

   Whereas Taban sees the commission as a show-off case, and is critical to how non-Muslims are treated in Khartoum, Abidin, as a Muslim and a member of the commission, has a far more positive view of the rights of, for instance, the Christians in Khartoum. According to him, the CPA and the Interim Constitution have secured the protection of the minorities in the North. When asked specifically whether Christians after the imple-

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[50]  Interview with Alfred Taban in Khartoum, February 24 2007.
[51]  Interview with Alfred Taban in Khartoum, February 24 2007.

mentation of the CPA are judged according to shari'a law, he stated that earlier, shari'a rules used to be applied to non-Muslims in certain *hudud* crimes such as murder and theft, whereas they did not apply to crimes such as apostasy, wine drinking, fornication or *qasf* [bringing false witnesses to fornication]. He believed that it was difficult for non-Muslims to comply with the shari'a prohibition against theft and alcohol selling, as many Christians were displaced and poor and have to find a way to make a living (see discussion above). He claimed, however, that "now [in 2007] Christians are no longer punished for these offences in accordance with the shari'a".[52] Taban admitted that, although it is true in practice that non-Muslims are no longer judged according to the *hudud* laws, theoretically there is still a problem. "The laws remain", he stated, "and the only reason for the Sudanese authorities to postpone the *hudud* punishments are the international reactions against them. The punishments might, though, be re-applied at any moment."

Many Christian leaders referred to the event in December 2006, when the police entered the All-Saints Cathedral and attacked worshippers, as a violation of freedom of religion. The mass was attended by individuals belonging to the Southern elite, including the former vice president Abel Alier. The newspaper *The Citizen* saw in the assault a case of Christian-Muslim hostility, stating that the assault on the All-Saints Cathedral was "an indication of *religious fanaticism, if not outright hostility towards Southerners*, inculcated by the regime into the psyche of the police [our italics]."[53] The journalist obviously associated hostility towards the Christian Southerners with 'religious fanaticism', implying, as Taban above, that all Southerners are Christians. However, given the fact that the number of Muslim southerners is approximately to equal to that of Christian southerners, and that they are both minorities in the South, followers of the traditional tribal religions being the majority there, there are good reasons to interpret the hostility between Southerners and Northerners in socio-political and cultural, rather than in religious terms. The leadership in Southern Sudan is Christian, however, as Mordechai Nisan has noted. He stated that the Southern African elite is particularly "a Christian vanguard", with "higher educational standards derived from missionary-school education, which offered religious instruction, the English language, and a worldly outlook" (Nisan 2002). The hostility between the political leadership in the South

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[52] Interview with al-Tayyib Zain Abidin in Khartoum, February 11, 2007.
[53] *The Citizen* on 12 February, 2007 Vol. 2 No 52. See also *The Citizen* on 24 February 2007. Vol. 2. No. 64.

and the North is thus portrayed in religious terms; the Christian leadership in the South versus the Islamic regime in the North, whereas the reality is much more complex.

## Conclusion

Sudan has signed the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights of 1966 (ICCPR) and is also committed to guarantee religious freedom as stated in Article 18 of the Covenant for Sudanese citizens. As the discussion above indicates, prior to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005, the Umar al-Bashir regime flouted the principle of religious freedom, not least by applying shariʻa law to non-Muslims. After 2005, the situation of rights has improved to a certain degree. However, as trade in alcohol is still prohibited after the CPA, also including non-Muslims; some Christian communities have difficulties in performing their rituals. Nor do the authorities live up to their commitment to the ICCPR in matters of religious education. Religious freedom is not fully guaranteed in the case of Muslims, because the right to not belong to a religion is not respected. The criminalization of conversion constitutes a serious violation of freedom of religion proclaimed in the ICCPR. Against this background, the widespread claim that only the Christians in Southern Sudan are victims of violation of religious freedom and powerlessness needs to be challenged. Moreover, the present study shows that political, cultural, and social divisions in Sudanese society have to be considered seriously when looking into the issue of religious freedom in Sudan.

The case of religious minorities in Sudan is complex and multifaceted, as ethnic boundaries between the communities are not drawn merely along religious lines. As a result of the tribal nature of the society and the complex cultural differences between the South and the North, any social demarcations and divisions are bound to be the product of more variables than the much publicized religious and political conflicts in Sudanese society.

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Interview with a European community worker affiliated with a Western Christian organisa-
    tion, who prefers to be anonymous.

# FROM POWER TO POWERLESSNESS: ZOROASTRIANISM IN IRANIAN HISTORY

## Michael Stausberg

The present chapter discusses a relevant, but generally neglected case of a religious minority in what is generally referred to as the 'Middle East', namely the case of Zoroastrianism. This is one of the oldest religious traditions of the world, with roots in the second millennium BCE and primordial ties to Iranian history and the country of Iran, where Zoroastrians until well after the Arabic-Islamic conquest in the mid-seventh century CE constituted the majority religious group.[1] While focusing on more recent developments,[2] the present chapter will put the minority question in a more long-term perspective. It starts with some reflections on terminology, before giving the argument a historical twist and looking at the historical origin of the majority/minority configuration, which is shown to have pre-Islamic antecedents. The conclusion will briefly wind up the argument by pointing to some dimensions of the core issue of this volume: power and powerlessness.

## Speaking of Religious Minorities

The notion of 'religious minorities' rests on a double distinction: Speaking of *religious* minorities only makes sense when religion can be distinguished

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[1] I wish to thank my colleague Jenny Rose for reading and correcting an earlier version of this essay. Thanks also to the editors of this volume for their careful editorial work and to Maurits van den Boogert for suggestions and comments.

[2] For general historical surveys of Zoroastrianism in modern Iran see Writer 1994; Stausberg 2002b: 152–262 (in German); Mehr 2002; Choksy 2006. Local ethnographic studies include Fischer 1973, who did fieldwork among the religious minorities of Yazd during the late 1960s; Boyce 1977, who paints a somewhat romantic picture of religious life in a remote village based on fieldwork in the early 1960s; Kestenberg Amighi 1990, on assimilation and ethnic persistence based on fieldwork in Teheran in the early to mid-1970s. For a more recent sketch of Yazd, see Green, 2000. See also Sanasarian 2000, for a synoptic survey of the religious minorities. Sarah Stewart (SOAS) is currently engaged in a comprehensive study of contemporary Zoroastrianism, including oral history.

as a recognizable, sufficiently differentiated sphere of social interaction—implying that the different religions acting within a religious field recognize each other as specimens of the same category, even though they typically attempt to deny the status of other religions by polemically referring to them as 'idol-worships', 'cults', 'sects' or whatever derogatory label may come to mind. At the same time, speaking of religious *minorities* is predicated on the existence of (religious) majorities, even though such majorities typically exist in the singular, with one majority versus several minorities.

On the face of it, the relationship between a minority and a majority is of a numerical kind, pointing to the distribution of religious affiliation in a given demographic context. In scholarly and non-scholarly discourses, however, beyond the numerical facts, the very establishment of which often serves specific interests, speaking of minorities is entangled with notions of power. (The present volume is a case in point.) The influential Chicago sociologist Louis Wirth (1897–1952) of German-Jewish descent articulated that very clearly in a seminal article published in 1945, where he defines "a minority as a group of people who, because of their physical and cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination" (Wirth 1945: 347). The relationship between majority and minority here exceeds the purely numerical[3] and is conceived as one of position and participation in society, mutual perception and self-perception, attitudes and behavior. In this understanding, as articulated by Wirth, but apparently generally taken for granted, discrimination is a defining feature of being a minority.

Although the minority group discussed in the present chapter, namely the Zoroastrians of Iran, neatly fits the proposed scheme in various respects, for the sake of logical consistency and conceptual clarity I would prefer to disentangle the numerical from the discriminatory aspects. To my mind, the asymmetrical power-relations beyond the purely numerical and statistical facts (which can go along with various power-relationships) should be referred to as *subordinate* versus *dominant* groups.[4] The dominant groups are powerful in that they, or allied forces such as the nation states, have the capacity "to decide what is decided" (Lukes 2005: 111), to carry out their

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[3]  Wirth 1945: 349: '. . . minorities are not to be judged in terms of numbers. The people whom we regard as a minority may actually, from a numerical standpoint, be a majority'.

[4]  Another set of power relationships is hegemony, characterized by the subordinates' consent. This does not seem to apply in the case studied in the following.

own will even against others and to frame the agenda for the others.[5] While the agency of the dominant group is affirmed and enabled, the agency of the subordinate group is restricted. Turning to religion, this means that the religious field is regulated in such a manner as to benefit the dominant group(s) and to curtail the agency of the subordinate group(s).

### The Historical Genesis of 'Religious Minorities' in Pre-Islamic Iran

The minority-question of the Middle East is typically identified with Islam as being the religious majority in question. Turning to Iranian history, in my interpretation (for more details see Stausberg, 2002a) it was during the reign of the Sasanians (224–651), the last of the pre-Islamic empires of Iran,[6] that the religious field—the ensemble of religious expressions in a given territory—was reorganized in such a manner that we find a dominant majority religion and several subordinate religious minorities. Zoroastrianism, the dominant religion backed up by the Sasanian kings, has a history going back far beyond the Sasanian period, to the earliest times of the emergence of Iranian ethnogenesis, in the sense that the ancient Zoroastrian texts, collectively known as the *Avesta*, at the same time provide the earliest evidence of Iranian languages and cultural concepts. Nonetheless, it is clear that not all Iranian territories were 'Zoroastrianized' in the sense of exclusive religious adherence, and there is plenty of evidence of religious forms of expression that cannot be classified as Zoroastrian (in a wider or a more narrow sense).

It is only with the early Sasanians that one finds kings who actively and exclusively sponsored Zoroastrian religious institutions, apparently as part of their project to create a unified empire. Already half a millennium earlier, Achaemenian kings had invoked Zoroastrian deities, most prominently Ahura Mazdā, and other elements of the Zoroastrian religion in their attempt to legitimate the creation and perpetuation of their empire (Lincoln 2007). Yet, it is the Sasanian kings who in their official proclamations not only recurred to the protection and support of (Zoroastrian) deities, but even explicitly professed their adherence to Zoroastrianism as a religion. The Sasanian kings identified themselves and were identifiable as Zoroastrian kings roughly a century before Constantine became

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[5] I follow Lukes 2005: 109 in his view that power refers to "an ability or capacity, which may or may not be exercised".

[6] See Daryaee 2009 for a recent comprehensive portrayal of the Sasanian Empire.

the first of the Christian Roman emperors. Besides the affirmation of religious identity, their use of religious symbols in official documents and their patronage of religious institutions such as ritual fires, religion was variously interlinked with the State in terms of administration and law. (This is why many scholars speak of a Sasanian 'state church'.) The tightening control over the religious field is also reflected in religious tensions aiming at the destruction of certain sanctuaries and at the elimination of religious variation ('heresy') and 'irreligion' and in reported codifications of the religious tradition. Zoroastrian religious texts from the Islamic era articulate the ideology of a 'religiocracy' by affirming the inseparable unity of kingship and religion. While this idea may well have had its supporters in Sasanian times, reality was more complex.

Besides unmarked or unnamed religious practices—i.e. religious practices, often of a local or regional nature, that cannot be identified in terms of an encompassing religious tradition—other groups with clearly marked religious identities had settled on territories that were (or were to become) part of the Sasanian Empire. Jews had been living on Iranian soil for many centuries, and Christianity took root there from early on in its history. No less than twenty Christian bishops were recorded in Iranian territory at the beginning of the Sasanian period. There were also other religious groups, and, with Manichaeism, a new, expanding, international religion came into being from within Iran in the early Sasanian period. In some regions of the Empire, especially in Mesopotamia (no longer a part of modern Iran), Zoroastrians never were the majority of the population. There is evidence that the different religious groups did not live isolated from each other but engaged in various forms of interaction and exchange, even though most of their normative documents tried to erect clear behavioral and ideological boundaries and often displayed critical or even hostile attitudes to each other. In fact, the reorganization of the religious field that occurred with the ascendance of the Sasanians swiftly led to unprecedented harshness in interreligious relationships. Mani, the apostle of Manichaeism, died in a Sasanian prison c.276 CE, and in his inscriptions a high-ranking (but later forgotten) third century priest proudly mentions that he instigated persecutions of several non-Zoroastrian religions. Sanctions like these were unheard of in pre-Sasanian times, not necessarily because people were less pious and aggressive or more tolerant, but because the religious field was not yet organized as an arena of competition between different, clearly identifiable, religious groups. Persecutions of Christians and Jews are also attested for later periods of Sasanian history, partly in conjunction with political events such as the wars with Rome.

Beside persecutions, the novel minority politics also entailed elements of official recognition and representation. The Jewish Exilarch, for example, was recognized as the head of the Jews and in charge of dispensing justice and collecting taxes. In the fifth century CE there was an edict officially recognizing Christianity, and an independent Persian Church came to be established, the head of which had to be recognized by the Sasanian emperor. There were various interactions and bonds between Jews, Christians and the Sasanian emperors: Khusraw I (r. 531–578), one of the most important Sasanian kings, even had a Christian wife. Khusraw II (r. 590–628) had two Christian wives from different branches: Maryam, the daughter of Byzantine emperor Maurice, and Shirin, an Aramaean Christian. The increasing acknowledgment of Christianity in the Sasanian Empire was reflected in a saying attributed to king Hormizd IV (579–590), reported by the historian Tabari, who compared the different religions of the Empire to the four legs of the throne: deleting one of them would lead to the collapse of the entire structure (Boswoth/al-Tabari 1999: 298). The king even advised the Zoroastrian priests that renouncing the desire to persecute the Christians and 'to become assiduous in good works' might in fact lead to the adherents of other faiths becoming attracted towards Zoroastrianism (Boswoth/al-Tabari 1999: 298). Tolerance of the dominant versus the subordinate religions is here conceived of as a means to strengthen the position of the dominant religion by making it more attractive.

### The Islamization of Iran and the Eclipse of Zoroastrianism

The Arab/Islamic conquest of the Sasanian Empire did not immediately translate into the Islamization of the country. It took several centuries before Islam became the majority religion of Iran, even though it had been the religion of the rulers right from the beginning. According to Jamsheed Choksy, it was only as late as around 1300 CE that Muslims had gained "complete control" over Iranian society (Choksy 1997: 143). Conversely, Zoroastrianism shrank into the role of a religious minority. More than that, Zoroastrians became a marginal group. Contrary to the Jews and the Christians, the Zoroastrians were virtually eradicated from the political scene in Medieval Iran (Khanbaghi 2006: 25). Concurrently with the entry of Iran into *dar al-islam* and the emergence of the Iranian shape of Islam (Yarshater 1998), or the Persianization of Islam, and despite the Zoroastrians' primordial ties to Iran, they apparently became ever more isolated in Persian-Islamic society.

While the Mongol invasion (1219–1224) gave fresh impetus to the Jews and the Christians in Iran, subsequent Mongol rule did not do much to alleviate the fate of the Zoroastrians, who perceived it as yet another major affliction. Also during the next main period, the reign of the Safavid dynasty (1501–1722), when Twelver Shiism was introduced as the official religion of the country, it seems that "the Zoroastrians were the least well accepted of all the non-Muslim groups" (Khanbaghi 2006: 97), even if they did not suffer hardship all over Iran. It must have been sometime during the early modern period that several Iranian Zoroastrian communities in Khorasan (northeast Iran) and Sistan (east Iran), as well as the Safavid Zoroastrian community of Isfahan, ceased to exist. In late Safavid times in the eighteenth century, it seems that the Zoroastrians got involved in the armed conflicts between the Safavids and the Afghan invaders and between the Zand dynasty and the Qajars, leading to retaliations against the Zoroastrian communities (Choksy 2006: 140–141; Khanbaghi 2006: 156–157).

As is well-known, Islam has a developed corpus of legal regulations concerning the recognition and treatment of other religions. The Zoroastrians have a somewhat ambiguous status in this system, because their recognition as a protected people (*dhimmi*) is not unequivocal and therefore open to negotiation. The notion of subordinate versus dominant religions, as outlined above, seems to fit the model of the Islamic legal framework quite well. Besides legal regulations, such as the payment of the poll-tax and strict enforcement of community boundaries including prohibitions of intermarriages, interreligious interaction was governed by a series of codes of conduct, some of which—especially those concerning water, food, and eating—were grounded in rules of purity of the respective religions; others, notably the special colors of clothes and restrictions in modes of transportation imposed on the minorities, clearly served to mark and stigmatize them. Some rules—such as those forbidding Zoroastrians to carry umbrellas— were clearly "ludicrous" (Mehr 2002: 281). Some rules and laws, such as that privileging Muslim offspring in matters of inheritance, served to stimulate de-affiliation from minorities and conversion to Islam.

In the twelve centuries from the Arab/Islamic conquest of the country to Euro-Russian expansion during the period of the Qajar dynasty (1779–1925), Zoroastrianism was reduced from a diffuse and partly dominant majority religion to a compact, subordinate religious minority.[7] In fact, apart from the Indian Zoroastrians, also known as Parsis, who had established indepen-

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[7] See Hourani 1982 [1947]: 14 for these terms; for a later discussion see Ben-Dor 1999: 7–11.

dent and stable communities on the Indian West Coast concurrently with the increasing Islamization of Iran, in the nineteenth century the former diffusion of Iranian Zoroastrianism was reduced to two geographical areas in central and southeast Iran respectively: the cities of Yazd and Kerman and some surrounding villages. While Zoroastrians still constituted the majority in a number of such villages, the number of these insular major-ity villages shrank in the long run; there were Zoroastrian quarters in the cities, but these were eventually infiltrated and reduced or even destroyed in the course of the centuries.

For the second half of the nineteenth century, available figures (Stausberg 2002a: 365–366) indicate that the number of Zoroastrians in the Yazd and Kerman regions together was well below 10,000. Moreover, available reports show that the Zoroastrians were suffering from pervasive and persistent discrimination and humiliation on the part of the Shia-Islamic majority population. These took the forms of 'ordinary' rules and codes of conduct, including the levying of the poll tax (often resulting in crisis and violence), but also 'extraordinary' acts of violation such as blackmailing, raids, assaults, rape, abduction, and murder were far from uncommon (Stausberg 2002: 368–372). There occurred a constant small-scale flow of conversions to Islam—partly enforced, such as when Zoroastrian girls were abducted and married off to Muslims against their will. Given the discriminatory laws of inheritance, according to which a Muslim descendent would inherit the entire estate of his minority parents at the expense of his minority siblings, conversions also threatened the material wealth of the community.

### Colonialism, Legal and Political Changes

Unsurprisingly, the memory of this large-scale discrimination is still very much part of the collective identity of the present-day Iranian Zoroastrians. In retrospect, it could well seem that the very existence of the Zoroastrian communities would have been endangered in the long run, if they had had to continue struggling in isolation against the same odds. At that point, transformative change could only come from the outside—and so it did, as the direct and indirect consequences of colonialism. As a result of developments during the subsequent century (as outlined in the follow-ing), the number of Zoroastrians tripled to some 25,000 (or even 30,000) in the mid-1970s (Stausberg 2002b: 240–241).

There had been occasional contacts between the Iranian Zoroastrians and the Parsis, their coreligionists in India. With the Indian West Coast

becoming part of colonial trading and political networks, and the Parsis getting increasingly involved in trade and establishing close ties with the British, contacts between Iranian and Indian Zoroastrians became more regular. In fact, something like a mass exodus of Iranian Zoroastrians to Western India started in the late eighteenth century, only to intensify during periods of the nineteenth century, and to continue down to World War II. This kind of refugee network again came in use after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The Iranian Zoroastrians who migrated to India in the modern period have constituted something like a sub-group of Indian Zoroastrianism, known as 'the Iranis'.

In part stimulated by the arrival of the Iranian refugees, in part by a continued attachment to their 'original homeland', and in part by the claim to the heritage of a glorious ancient civilization (Iran) that could enhance their cultural prestige in the colonial context, the Parsis not only accommodated Iranian Zoroastrian refugees (even if somewhat reluctantly), but they also directly intervened in Iranian affairs. One of the most effective ways of doing this was by founding, in 1853, an association that explicitly aimed at ameliorating the conditions of the Iranian Zoroastrians. In 1854, this association sent an emissary to Iran; he not only filed important reports about the miserable situation of the Iranian Zoroastrians (he also blamed their ignorance and lack of education and collaboration for their fate) but also coordinated a vast array of activities that served to relieve the distress of the Iranian Zoroastrians and to rehabilitate (and to update) their material culture, for example by renovating religious buildings; to some extent these activities can be described as foreign aid. Manekji Limji Hataria, the first Parsi emissary, who remained in Iran for almost 35 years and who married an Iranian Zoroastrian lady from Kerman, networked and campaigned widely, also involving foreign diplomats and international connections (Stausberg 2002: 154–164; Ringer 2009).

Manekji's campaign resulted in a substantial legal change: in 1882, by an imperial decree, Zoroastrians were in perpetuity liberated from the payment of the poll tax, the levying of which had always caused serious problems and tensions. Apart from abolishing the *jizya*, the imperial decree put the Zoroastrians on equal footing with the Muslims in all matters of taxation. In 1898 another royal decree officially abolished all the discriminations suffered by the Zoroastrians (Stausberg 2002: 164–165). Even so, there was a great distance from the lofty promises of a royal decree to the day-to-day realities in the provinces, and Zoroastrians continued to be discriminated, and even the poll-tax was temporarily re-imposed (Stausberg 2002: 165–168). Now, however, circumstances had changed in such a manner as to allow

them to challenge their fate, and the royal decrees were a way to give legitimacy to their claims. Moreover, the Zoroastrian community of Kerman found itself in a special situation; the British consul had extended his good offices to the Zoroastrians, given that a vast majority of the Zoroastrians, namely the Parsis in India, were British subjects (Sykes 1906: 760). At the same time, as Jamsheed Choksy has rightly pointed out, unlike the close links between the Parsis and the British colonial power in India, there never developed very strong ties between the Iranian Zoroastrians and the British in Iran (Choksy 2006: 144–146).

While the contribution of the Indians, the work of the Parsi emissary and, regionally, the occasional intervention of the representative of British colonial power were crucial to open up the closed situation of powerlessness of the Iranian Zoroastrians, towards the end of the nineteenth century the Zoroastrians themselves started to affirm their own political agency. This was facilitated by the creation of new associations that served to regulate the internal affairs of the local Zoroastrian communities and to represent them to the outside world. Apart from providing forums for protest against maltreatment, this reorganization of the community administration obviously had implications for the power structure within the communities; collective effort replaced the will of the elders, mostly merchants and priests (Mehr 2002: 287). Moreover, since the late nineteenth century, Zoroastrian merchants managed to accumulate capital, and they started other ventures and enterprises, including banking; their capital and networks allowed them not only to react to injustice but to contribute more actively to influencing the political agenda and to developing a framework for the future development of the Zoroastrian communities.

An important case in point is the early twentieth century Constitutional Revolution, where the leading Zoroastrians contributed by providing shelter, weapons and funds for the revolutionaries. Among many other things, the debate on the new Constitution, which was proclaimed in 1906 (and mainly modeled on the Belgian Constitution from 1831), dealt with the position of Islam and the civil status of the religious minorities. Seen from the perspective of the minorities, the results were ambivalent. In the Supplementary Constitutional Law (1907) Islam in its Jafari (Twelver Shia) form, is affirmed as the official religion of the country (article 1), and while the existence or the rights of the other religions are nowhere affirmed, article 8 decrees that all people of the Persian Empire are to enjoy equal rights before the law—a wording reportedly smuggled into the text by an influential Zoroastrian; in the original draft that right was only granted to Muslims (Stausberg 2002b: 174–175). Articles 9 and 10 specify a series of

legal provisions concerning life, property, etc. This provision was soon to be tested when a prominent Zoroastrian banker and constitutionalist was murdered for political motives. While there was a public outrage demanding the execution of the murderers, the idea that several Muslims should be executed for the death of a single Zoroastrian was apparently inconceivable, and the murderers were punished by lashes and prison (Afary 1996: 138). While this was a high-profile case in the center of the Empire, for most minority people in the remoter provincial areas the provisions given in the constitutional laws remained lofty words only (Choksy 2006: 151).

It can be argued that, although the 1906 Constitution (which largely remained unchanged, but without being always in force, until 1979) does not mention Zoroastrianism as a religion, it does grant the Zoroastrians, as people of the Iranian Empire, fundamental individual rights.[8] Nevertheless, individual Zoroastrians (or members of other religious minorities for that matter) are far from being on equal footing in the political system. Note that article 58 specifies that only Muslims can attain the rank of Minister. Moreover, a Zoroastrian cannot become an elected representative of Muslims in the parliament (*majles*). On the collective level, however, the non-Islamic religious minorities are implicitly acknowledged, since Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians were given the right to elect representatives of their own—amounting to an indirect recognition of their existence and giving them a minimal loophole of participation in the political system. Even this minimal acknowledgment, however, was perceived as so problematic as to potentially jeopardize the nationalist movement, resulting in a 'request', in reality a threat, to the minorities not to execute their rights. While the Jews and the Christians complied, the Zoroastrians maneuvered their way around and got their representative, the merchant, estate owner, and banker Arbab Jamshid (1850–1932), admitted to the *majles,* otherwise an all-Muslim body (Afary 1996: 70; Stausberg 2002b: 173; Mehr 2002: 281). The Jewish and Christian representatives were admitted from the second period onwards. Now, however, it was stipulated that all candidates had to declare their adherence to Islam, and even the three minority candidates had to have a "sound" religious reputation in their respective religion (Afary 1996: 263). Moreover, as in the case of the individual rights, while this scheme worked on the national level, it was not immediately transferable

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[8]  See Afary 2005, for a comparison of the Iranian Constitution with the Belgian, Bulgarian, and Ottoman Constitutions respectively. For the status of the minorities, Afary notes that "the language of the law was less explicit and forthcoming" than that of the other Constitutions (Afary 2005: 158).

to the provinces; hence, "[i]n Yazd, contrary to specific regulations from the Majles that the provincial anjumans [councils] must represent their regional constituencies, the anjuman refused to seat a Zoroastrian, since the 'ulama would not recognize the rights of the Zoroastrian community to public representation" (Afary 1996: 316). The political turmoil remained in the country until Reza Shah (1925–1941) effectively ruled out the enforcement of the spirit and the letter of the Constitution.

The reign of Reza Shah brought important legal changes which can be described as a secularization and nationalization of the judiciary system. In the long run, "the uniform national nature of these civil codes . . . brought greater physical safety, increased access to education, enhanced opportunities for employment, and provided freedom of expression of religious and cultural practices for Zoroastrians" (Choksy 2006: 154). During the reign of Reza Shah some specific forms of discrimination were formally abolished, albeit not without resistance. Here are just two examples: Zoroastrian men were no longer forced to wear the yellow dress, and Zoroastrians were eventually allowed to ride on mules, donkeys, and horses (Stausberg 2002b: 169–170, 180). When general conscription was introduced in 1925, at first members of the national minorities were excluded; this law was changed in 1938, and henceforth also Zoroastrians were allowed to fight for the country with which they identified (Stausberg 2002b: 180).[9]

In the early 1930s, the minorities were granted separate personal status laws, which took some time to be accepted by the government, mostly because of a specific rule in Zoroastrian law of adoption and divorce (Stausberg 2002b: 181). The Family Protection Law of 1967, which was applicable to all Iranian citizens and which also made it possible for Zoroastrian women to apply for divorce in civil courts (Mehr 2002: 295), brought the Zoroastrian community under closer patronage of the state.

The fact that in theory the Zoroastrians enjoyed equality under public law, on equal footing with the other people of the Empire (except in some matters of family law), went a long way to providing some amount of agency to minorities by putting an end to the subordinate position to which

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[9] The inclusion of Zoroastrians in general conscription is generally celebrated as an achievement and not as an act of exploitation; Zoroastrians actively sought to be admitted. In a speech in the Majles in March 1925, in the context of a debate on conscription, the Zoroastrian representative argued that this issue should not divide the Muslim from non-Muslims Iranians who must share 'joy and sorrow' with their Muslim Iranian brothers. In his eyes, not being considered for conscription would amount to being separated from the honour of 'Iranianism' (Shahrokh/Writer 1994: 136).

they had found themselves confined. The theory, however, was not always followed in practice; discrimination and prejudice remained "daily experiences" for minority people living in the province (Sanasarian 2000: 56); Zoroastrian girls continued to be abducted, and insults and manhandling still occurred (Choksy 2006: 161). On a greater scale, the more stable and equal treatment of the Zoroastrians came into effect only in the final decade of the reign of Muhammad Reza Pahlavi (Choksy 2006: 154), shortly before the Islamic Revolution—and in a climate of general political repression. Zoroastrians experienced a more equal treatment especially in the capital, where, as a result of rapid urbanization, around half of the Zoroastrian population of Iran was living by the 1960s (Stausberg 2002b: 240).

### Nationalism: Ideological Reassessment and Civic Zoroastrianism

Zoroastrians are the oldest religious community living in Iran, and Zoroastrianism can claim to be the original religion of the country.[10] Already in apologetic and polemical texts in Middle Persian, written in the first centuries of Islamic rule, Zoroastrian theologians presented their religion as the Iranian religion per se, the given (natural) religion of the Iranians, contrasted to the foreign ones and to the religions of the non-Iranians. (Insofar as Iran is better than all the other countries, this also implied an ethnocentric and apologetic evaluation of the religion of the Iranians, namely Zoroastrianism.) About the texts written by Zoroastrians between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries, Aptin Khanbaghi has recently observed:

> One of the most interesting features of the texts produced by the Zoroastrians in the Medieval period is their belief in their apanage of Iranian identity; Iranian and Zoroastrian are synonyms in these texts and it is only in the 20th century that Zoroastrian authors accept their non-Zoroastrian compatriots as Iranians (Khanbaghi 2006: 147–148).

Thus the Zoroastrians have a long history of religious nationalism, which they stubbornly maintained in spite of their increasing marginalization in Persian society.

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[10] Contrary to Christianity and Islam there are no direct records of the pre-Zoroastrian religious situation; the pre-Zoroastrian 'paganism' therefore needs to be reconstructed; this was done by Zoroastrian theologians in ancient times (see de Jong 2005) and is still being done by modern scholars (Stausberg 2002a: 115–117).

As a modern political concept, nationalism could engage various attitudes to religion, from anti- or irreligion to various reinterpretations of traditional religion,[11] from stressing continuity to rupture between pre-Islamic and Islamic Iran. An important ideological resource for nationalist identity myths (Smith 1991: viii) and discourses was recourse to pre-Islamic Iranian civilization. Since the mid-nineteenth century, one finds new systematic attempts at studying ancient Iranian history, and Manekji, the Parsi emissary, actively involved himself in these projects (Stausberg 2003). Another central aspect of nationalism was language politics, i.e. the attempt to 'purify' the Persian language by 'cleansing' it of Arabic elements and by 'restoring' its 'purity'. Moreover, in 1925, in the early period of Reza Shah's reign, the calendar was reformed by introducing a solar year (with the Hijra as the starting point for the era), the twelve months of which were given the names of Zoroastrian deities and divine beings, in agreement with the Zoroastrian calendar. This is an example of an element of minority religion becoming part of mainstream civic culture. In the field of onomastics, in nationalist-minded circles one finds a preference for Iranian names, mostly taken from pre-Islamic history and epics—including the very name of the country which was changed from 'Persia' to 'Iran'. When last names were introduced, people were exhorted to choose genuine Iranian names. Archaeological projects of recovery were started and symbols from pre-Islamic Iran became prominent on public buildings.

Finally, the celebration of the ancient Iranian heritage, as a form of symbolic capital, was an important maneuver for creating political legitimacy, especially by the second and last Pahlavi Shah. Some well-known instances include: Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi's assumption of the fictive old Iranian title *Aryamehr* ('Light of the Aryans') in 1965/67; the pretentious and pompous feast to celebrate 2,500 years of kingship in Iran at Persepolis in 1971—an event which probably helped to end the tradition it sought to celebrate; and, in 1976, the replacement of the Hijra as the starting point of the era, substituting the alleged date of the founding of the Persian Empire by Cyrus the Great, which turned the year 1355 (solar Hijri) into the year 2535 of the royal era (*shahanshahi*). This act of imperial hubris provided another attempt at 'de-Islamifying' public national culture, and it provoked outrage among opponents who, led by Ayatollah Khomeini, claimed that replacing the Islamic era amounted to a desire to abolish Islam. Acts such as these nourished rumors that the Shah—similar rumors had already

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[11] For an early study of early Iranian nationalism, see Keddie 1962.

been circulated about his father—was secretly adhering to Zoroastrianism (Stausberg 2002b: 211–214). Representing a source of symbolic capital, Zoroastrianism moved closer to power and its abuse.

As these (unfounded) rumors show, there was only a fine line dividing discourses on pre-Islamic Persia from discourses on Zoroastrianism. Declaring an attachment to the pre-Islamic past can be positively or negatively related to a commitment to Zoroastrianism. While one can, theoretically, be interested merely in the artistic, martial, or political aspects of the pre-Islamic past, aficionados of pre-Islamic culture would generally also hold a sympathetic attitude towards Zoroastrianism, since this religion was an integrated part of the whole. From being a marginal, marginalized, discriminated, and suspicious minority, Zoroastrianism had moved into the core of mainstream discursive, imaginary, and symbolic representations of Iranian identity, giving it some degree of symbolic power. I suggest calling this 'civic' Zoroastrianism. It entails a discursive or symbolic attachment to a former national religion but not a commitment to a specific religious minority group, which did not derive any immediate benefit from its new symbolic representation. The community is of interest only insofar as it has kept the flame of memory alive. This becomes apparent, for example, when the main fire temple of Yazd is overcrowded by visitors during the New Year (*norouz*) celebrations. Others can proclaim themselves to be Zoroastrians at heart, even if they would not seek formal admission to the religion (but some covertly did and some still do). Especially in the Islamic Republic, proclaiming a Zoroastrian identity appears as a mode of cultural critique, as a third way between State-Islamism and Westernism. While there is also an Islamic Iranian nationalism, which tends to regard Islam as the fulfillment of ancient Iranian civilization (if a positive significance is ascribed to that at all) and thereby replaces Zoroastrianism as a point of reference, pre-Islamic Iranian nationalism tends to be secular, with an un- or even anti-Islamic flavor.

### *Diffusion, Education, and the Breakdown of Ritual Boundaries*

Concurrently with Zoroastrianism moving into the symbolic core of Iranian nationalism, many Zoroastrians migrated to Teheran, the (new) capital of the state. As a result of this migration, in the period from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1960s, the percentage of the Zoroastrian population living in Teheran increased from one to over 50 percent of the entire Iranian Zoroastrian population, with the main increase occurring

since the 1950s (Stausberg 2002b: 239–241). This process has continued since then. Moreover, Zoroastrian villages have become parts of provincial towns; many villages are by now only nominally populated, with the majority of the people who stay on being old members of the communities, while others maintain houses but de facto live elsewhere. From an overwhelmingly agricultural community with some elements of trade, Iranian Zoroastrianis turned into something like an urban middle-class society. Some entered professions such as medicine, engineering, and architecture, or applied sciences. Some Zoroastrians even obtained prominent positions in the state bureaucracy and the army, but even during the reign of the Pahlavi-dynasty "Zoroastrians continued to be barred from the judiciary" (Mehr 2002: 299).

Although the Zoroastrian community of Teheran increased the Zoroastrians have remained a tiny minority in the ever expanding capital— something like a drop in the ocean. While there is one residential housing colony, some residential buildings and some neighborhoods with a higher concentration of Zoroastrians, in general the Teheran community appears scattered in spatial terms. There is what can be described as kind of a community centre with a fire-temple, the seat and offices of the community organization and a hall to celebrate initiations and weddings in Teheran, but many Zoroastrians continue to regard the former settlements in the province as the more important ritual centers. From a compact minority, Zoroastrianism has turned into a diffuse/scattered one.

The mentioned changes in the occupational structure, corresponding to a declining significance of land, which lost its value as a basis of agriculture (but remained an important capital for developers), are also a result of a greater importance of modern education. Emphasis has been laid on education since the work of the Parsi emissary, and this has been continued to some extent, leading to the creation of schools specifically meant for Zoroastrian children. While it would be wrong to say that Iranian Zoroastrians are a community of intellectuals, they seem to be a fairly well educated by Iranian standards, and this has enabled many among them to compete for modern white-collar jobs.

Until the twentieth century, the organization of the religious field operated with clear-cut boundaries between robust and compact religious groups. Several of the changes indicated above resulted in making such boundaries less visible and apparently less important (but far from nonexistent). This is also reflected in religious practice. In the key-period of the modernizing project—from the 1920s to the 1970s—some of the most distinctive ritual practices of Zoroastrianism were abolished (Stausberg

2004). Most visibly, the Zoroastrian funeral practice of exposing the dead to vultures in so-called towers of silence (*dakhme*) was done away with, and also some related elements of the funerals were discontinued. Their replacement by burial in cemeteries expressed a clear desire to become part of the cultural mainstream (even though the graves, in order to do justice to Zoroastrian purity rules, are constructed somewhat differently from their Muslim counterparts). Purity rules are an important mechanism of creating and maintaining boundaries between different religious groups. Purity rules are prominent both in Zoroastrianism and in Shia Islam. Accordingly, in tune with the decreased importance of community boundaries, purity rules were downplayed, important rituals of purification were no longer practiced, and the purificatory substance considered to be most efficient, namely consecrated bull's urine (*nirang*), was no longer produced and applied. Educated Zoroastrians apparently found these practices embarrassing. In a similar fashion, the extended priestly rituals, often systematically connected to both the rituals of purification and the funerals, were shortened or discontinued. Related to this, the significance of the fire was redefined, and the fire cult was simplified. In a radical departure from previous stipulations, some fires and fire temples have to some extent been made accessible to people from other religions. At the same time, and often in reception of interpretations from Western and Parsi scholars, the foundations of the religious identity of Zoroastrianism have, often in reception of interpretations by Western and Parsi scholars, been redefined to consist of the alleged original message of Zarathustra, thus emphasizing ethics and monotheism rather than rituals and the variety of the presence of the divine (Stausberg 2002b: 219–234). To some extent, discourse has replaced ritual as the key-idiom of religious communication.

## The Islamic Republic

During the 125 years from Manekji's arrival in 1854 to the Shah's departure in 1979, the socio-economic situation of the Iranian Zoroastrians substantially improved: from being a subordinate minority group the Zoroastrians were on their way to becoming citizens of the Iranian empire, and their religion had received positive recognition in nationalist discourse. This does not mean that all Zoroastrians were uncritical supporters of the Shah. Nevertheless, once the revolution steered onto an Islamist path and the country turned into an Islamic Republic, the political change took a heavy toll on the situation of the Zoroastrians although the revolution as such did not

cause casualties among Zoroastrians. Khomeini, the leader of the revolution and the subsequent head of state, was highly critical of the pre-Islamic nationalist discourse. He held a traditional view of the religious minorities as impure heathens, and he kept on using derogatory vocabulary when referring to them, even though he made more accommodating statements after having come to power (Stausberg 2002b: 188, 190).

Paradoxically, the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran from 1979 is the first legal document that officially acknowledges the rights of the 'recognized' religious minorities, namely Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians (in this order). This "institutionalization of segmentation" under the label of *aqaliat* ('religious minorities') has become "a unique byproduct of the new regime", as Eliz Sanasarian aptly puts it (2000: 154). According to the Constitution, article 13, "within the limits of the law" the religious minorities "are free to perform their religious rites and ceremonies, and to act according to their own canon in matters of personal affairs and religious education".[12] It turned out that the seemingly innocent qualification "within the limits of the law" was to entail serious restrictions. The subsequent article (14) states that "the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and all Muslims are duty-bound to treat non-Muslims in conformity with ethical norms and the principles of Islamic justice and equity, and to respect their human rights." Taking past experiences with the interpretation and application of Islamic principles of justice and equity by Iranian Muslims into account, such a wording could not instil much confidence among the concerned parties. In continuity with the Constitution from 1906, minorities (including Zoroastrians) maintained the right to elect their own representatives to the parliament. On the other hand, a Zoroastrian cannot be elected to represent a Muslim electorate, and the Zoroastrian representative hardly has any significant power within the political system of the Islamic Republic.

Article 4 of the Constitution stipulates: "All civil, penal, financial, economic, administrative, cultural, military, political, and other laws and regulations must be based on Islamic criteria. This principle applies absolutely and generally to all articles of the Constitution as well as to all other laws and regulations". Given that this reversed the secularization of the legal system, this stipulation turned out to have very serious ramifications for the Zoroastrians, especially with regard to the penal code and the law of

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[12]  All quotes from the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran are taken from http://www.servat.unibe.ch/law/icl/ir00000_.html (accessed May 18, 2009).

inheritance, which again makes conversion to Islam an attractive option.[13]
Where they occurred, such conversions were publicized for propaganda
purposes.[14] A particularly sensitive issue has been the question of the
compensatory blood money (*die*) that was denied in the case of murders
of non-Muslims. In this question, however, the government changed its
policy in 2002 by acknowledging an equal share of compensatory blood
money for the recognized minorities.

Apart from the paradox of the simultaneous constitutional recognition
and discriminatory legal stipulations, especially in the early period of the
Islamic Republic, the subordinate minority status has once again char-
acterized the negotiations of daily life. Zoroastrians faced more hostile
reactions, more limited public security, some amount of persecution and
forced marriages, and occasional revival of the concept of ritual impurity
(*najes*) as well as the use of insulting terms such as *gabr* and *kafir* (Choksy
2006: 164–165), not to speak of the restrictions in public appearance and
behaviour imposed on all inhabitants of the Islamic Republic. Given that the
state obtained an explicit Islamic identity serving the interests of Muslims
as its main constituency, careers in the army and the public sector were
effectively blocked for Zoroastrians (Choksy 2006: 166). "Job discrimination
became rampant throughout the 1980s" for all minorities, reports Sanasar-
ian (2000: 87). The war with Iraq and the perpetual economic crisis of the
Islamic Republic, resulting in high unemployment and inflation, affected
Zoroastrians as much as all ordinary Iranians without specific access to
the networks of power. While it would be wrong to classify the Iranian
Zoroastrians as a poor community by Iranian standards, there certainly is
a fair amount of poverty in the community, and the emigration of wealthy
members of the community occurred at the expense of networks of sup-
port, even though many of the rich people continue to provide various
forms of aid from abroad.

Despite some misleading information contained in previous census
records (which the Zoroastrian community did nothing to dispel),[15] and in
line with available information for the other recognized religious minorities,
since the establishment of the Islamic Republic, the Zoroastrian population
of Iran has declined by some 25–30 percent (to less than 20,000 adherents),
and their birth rate is lower than that of the Muslim population.[16] (I am

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[13]  See also Sanasarian, in this volume.
[14]  See Sanasarian 2000: 130–131 for the example of a convert from Zoroastrianism.
[15]  It was also uncritically adopted by Hemmassi and Prorok 2002.
[16]  Richard Foltz (Montreal) informs me that the fertility rate is well below replacement
level.

told that according to an internal census, there are at present some 18,000 Zoroastrians in Iran.) Moreover, again as with all other religious minorities (Hemmasi and Prorok 2002), urbanization has continued and even increased after the revolution; there was, and continues to be, a strong trend of emigration (which, together with the low fertility rate, is the main reason for the demographic decline of the community). The general prospects for the community appear to be grim, given the structural framework of the Islamic Republic. While Zoroastrian spokespersons have not avoided criticizing the government right from the beginning (Sanasarian 2000: 70–71), and while some continue to do so (Choksy 2006: 180–181), no Zoroastrians have become prominent in any sort of resistance movement; as a community the Zoroastrians keep a low-profile—everything else could easily lead to retaliations.

When it comes to religion, the trends observed for the Pahlavi period have continued; there has been no rise of any form of Zoroastrian fundamentalism. Members of the laity have been increasingly admitted to perform priestly duties. In general, religion has certainly attracted greater attention in the Islamic Republic than before, and the imposed sense of being part of a religious minority "has served to galvanize the community, strengthening its sense of identity, purpose and continuity" (Choksy 2006: 172). The dominant religious idiom of public discourse has been appropriated in that sense. On the other hand, the government heavily regulates the field of religious education (even within Zoroastrian schools) and does not give Zoroastrians access to the media in order to disseminate insider perspectives on Zoroastrianism, nor does it easily grant permission to erect new religious buildings. In spite of these restrictions, a number of smaller shrines have come into existence, and others have recently been renovated. One desert shrine some 50 km northeast of Yazd now functions as something like a national Zoroastrian pilgrimage centre, attracting large crowds during the annual pilgrimage in summer. Security police prevent Muslims from access to the shrine, thereby at the same time protecting and shielding the event.[17] Given that religious rituals and feasts are the only legitimate occasions for relaxation of certain rules of conduct imposed by the Islamic Republic—at least as long as these events are shielded from the Muslim population and have been authorized by the government—these have turned into important social celebrations and displays. Fifteen Zoroastrians who lost their lives as soldiers or in bombings during the war against Iraq are now generally acknowledged as 'martyrs' (*shahid*). This

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[17] See Langer 2008, for an inventory of these shrines and pilgrimage-centres.

index of the sacrifice of Zoroastrian blood for their motherland is not only proclaimed in official pronouncements and to some extent acknowledged by the government, but also photographs of these martyrs are found in Zoroastrian public buildings and are displayed in public celebrations. There is an apparent mimesis of the martyr-discourse of the Islamic Republic, given that the concept of martyr had been absent in Zoroastrianism (Stausberg 2002b: 218f; 2004: 533–534).

### Some Conclusions and Prospects

In this chapter I argue that it is not the numerical size and distribution of religious groups that matters (minority/majority), what matters most is their relation in terms of domination/subordination: in other words, relationships of power. I furthermore contend that this sort of relationship is not a natural fact, but requires a specific organization of the religious field, which is a product of historical developments. In the case of Iran, I hold that the decisive developments into this direction occurred in the (early) Sasanian period, i.e. several centuries before the coming of Islam.

Zoroastrianism was at the forefront of this process, and the fate of this religion in the course of a millennium, from the third to the thirteen centuries CE, was to change from being a dominant majority religion to a subordinate religious minority. The subsequent six centuries reduced the spread of the religion to some limited geographical areas, to become a compact regional religion in the Iranian context. Larger-scale geopolitical developments and the modernizing project again changed the picture, and Zoroastrians successfully challenged their fate. They were on their way to becoming 'ordinary' citizens of the state, with a prospect of equal social and economic opportunities. With a limited adjustment in the form of de-emphasis of religious and ritual boundaries, and a reformulation of the doctrinal, ritual, and organizational structure of the religion in the nationalist context, Zoroastrianism moved upwards in the symbolical and discourse universe, so that both the religion and its adherents became part of Iranian civic culture. This process was stopped, and to some extent reversed, after the Islamic Revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic. Although some Zoroastrians bravely voiced criticism, often also in the name of the Iranian nation, which the Zoroastrians claim to represent in a primordial manner, there was neither militancy nor mobilization; the prevalent responses were submission and loyalty, emigration/exit, a "clannish" (Wirth 1945: 360) withdrawal into themselves, and a return to more

group-specific identity projects, mainly with a religious focus. Throughout these twentieth century trajectories, Zoroastrianism sacrificed some of its distinct traits to this project of nationalist mimesis, and discourse replaced ritual as its main idiom.

Power and powerlessness are social and interactive categories which relate to a number of issues and aspects. As this chapter hopefully has illustrated, power is negotiated, produced and reproduced in discursive, economic, educational, geographical, legal, political, and symbolical forms. Power is exerted both in overt and more subtle forms. In extant scholarship there is a tendency—call it implicit Marxism—to consider religion exclusively as the object, result, or symptom of non-religious relationships of power, be they of a political, economic, or otherwise nature. (As the attentive reader will have noted, the present chapter is not quite innocent in this regard either.) Yet, religion in itself is an important arena of empowerment and disempowerment, by creating, regulating, and denying human and superhuman agency.[18] Power is more than domination over others (Lukes 2005: 109).

Let me conclude with a final statement of a much more general nature. It may sound paradoxical, but may well be true: There will be no acceptable solution to the minority question as long as there are minorities in the first place. There will always be majorities and minorities in the numerical sense—religions that are more or less efficient in attracting and sustaining adherence[19]—but it is only as long as the relations between (numerical) majority and minorities are conceived in terms of dominant vs. subordinate groups that there will be a 'minority issue'. One solution is the abolishment of subordinate minorities altogether, not by way of their extinction, of course, but by the very idea of a pluralistic society, which has minorities in a numerical sense, but no subordinate ones. Yet, although there is no 'minority issue' in a truly pluralist society, issues of power and powerlessness will not disappear in such a society either.

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[18] For supernatural agents as the cognitive and evolutionary cornerstone of religion, see Pyssiäinen 2009. Religion establishes ways to communicate with non-human agencies, but religions also restrict access to and certain forms of such communication, for example through gender rules and roles or by delegitimizing communication with some agents such as 'demons'.

[19] Religions with more members or higher growth rates are of course no better than others; nor are they more successful, for it may well be possible that smaller religions do not regard growth as their main aim or mission.

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## BAHA'IS OF IRAN: POWER, PREJUDICES AND PERSECUTIONS

### Margit Warburg

This chapter presents and analyses the position of the Baha'is of Iran and their relationship with Iranian society, including the State and the Iranian *ulama*. After the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran in 1979, the Baha'i minority has suffered from intensified persecutions, and the analysis deals primarily with these persecutions as seen in the light of the Baha'is' historical relationship with the Iranian State and the *ulama*, respectively. The analysis includes the issue of the position of the Baha'i minority in Iran, the doctrinal tensions between the Baha'is and the *ulama*, and the different prejudices about the Baha'is, which fuel the popular support to the persecutions.

### *The Baha'is*

The Baha'is constitute the largest religious minority group in Iran, with more than 300,000 followers by 1979 (Smith 1984; Smith 2000: 208).[1] The religion has its background in heterodox movements in Shiʿa Islam in nineteenth-century Iran.[2] In 1844 this milieu gave rise to an important millenarian movement, Babism. The leader of the movement, called the Bab (born 1821, executed 1850), saw himself as the gate to the Hidden Imam, and he succeeded in attracting quite a number of followers. In the following years the movement radicalised in religious terms, and in the summer of 1848 the Babis abrogated the shariʿa officially and declared that the era of Islam was over and a new revelation had dawned (MacEoin 1986).

The Babi movement was soon perceived as a revolutionary threat, and the government attempted to suppress the movement by military force. The government's fear of the Babis was not totally unfounded, because

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[1] The number of Baha'is in Iran must have decreased to some extent since the revolution in 1979, because many Baha'is have fled from Iran, but no reliable census is available.

[2] For an overview of the rise and development of the Babi and Baha'i religions see Smith 1987 or Warburg 2006: 6–15.

already in a circulatory letter early in 1848, the Bab declared himself to be the Hidden Imam (MacEoin 1986; MacEoin 1992: 82). According to Shi'ite thinking, this announcement meant that the power of the ulama was nullified, and the shah himself should subordinate to the Bab, who was to lead the faithful in the final battle against the unbelievers (MacEoin 1982; Momen 1985: 170–171).

In 1852–53 after several years of irregular battles between the Babis and the governmental troops, all the main Babi leaders had been killed or exiled, and the Babi movement lost its impetus and went underground. In the 1860s, the remnants of the movement developed into the Baha'i religion under the exiled Babi leader, Mirza Husayn-Ali Nuri (1817–1892), called Baha'u'llah. He attempted to uphold the delicate position of being in non-violent opposition to the Iranian State wishing to change the perception of the Babis as religious revolutionaries. Instead, both Baha'u'llah and his son and successor Abdu'l-Baha (1844–1921) advocated in writing for political reform in Iran (Cole 1992; Cole 1998: 79–108). Apparently this policy helped, and in the 1880s and 1890s a number of Baha'is held high positions in the government (Cole 1998: 97). However, the improved relations with the State did not prevent the occasional eruption of mob riots with lootings of Baha'i property and killings of Baha'is. These local persecutions had a seedbed in the widespread public animosity against the Baha'is and were often encouraged from *ulama* circles (Amanat 2008).

In the same period, the religion began to spread outside Iran: in the beginning by mission among the expatriate Iranian communities in Iraq, Turkey, Syria, Egypt and India, especially in Bombay. A flourishing Baha'i community was established in Ashkabad in Russian Turkestan during the 1880s by Iranian emigrants (Momen 1991). Baha'i missionaries also went to the USA and Canada in the 1890s, and to Western Europe around 1900. Effective growth in Europe did not occur, however, until after World War II, when Abdu'l-Baha's grandson and successor, Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957), organised a Baha'i mission in Europe, assisted by American Baha'is who came to Europe as Baha'i missionaries. During the 1960s and 1970s the Baha'is of the USA grew to become a wealthy and most influential community among the Baha'is worldwide.[3]

According to Baha'i doctrines both the Bab and Baha'u'llah are prophets and also "manifestations of God", which is in conflict with the central Islamic doctrine of Muhammad as the seal of the prophets. The Baha'is

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[3]  The American Baha'i community grew from around 10,000 members in the beginning of the 1960s to 63,500 in 1975. See Warburg 2006: 215.

believe that by following the revelations of Baha'u'llah, humankind will become religiously and politically unified into one future world civilisation based on world peace and the enforcement of international law. In line with this vision the Baha'is advocate a number of social and ethical principles which emphasise universalism, cultural diversity, gender equality, and equal opportunities for all.

On a world basis, the total number of Baha'is was less than half a million in 1963, but in the subsequent decades the number of Baha'is outside Iran rose quite rapidly (Smith 2000: 137–154). Today, the Baha'is claim a membership of more than 5.5 million with Baha'i communities present in nearly all countries of the world.[4]

The rise of the Baha'i religion is extraordinary in the history of Islam. No other Islamic movement, whether emerging from a Sunni or a Shi'ite environment, has asserted its independence from its mother creed and claimed to be a religion in its own right (MacEoin 1990). For example, the Ahmadiyyas, who hold their founder Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835–1908) to be a new prophet after Muhammad, regard themselves to be Muslims although they are not recognised as such by many influential Muslim clerics and organisations.[5] In contrast, both Muslims and Baha'is agree that Baha'i does not belong to the Islamic creed. Furthermore, Baha'i has also effectively transgressed the borders of its cultural homeland, Iran, so that the vast majority of its adherents have a non-Muslim background. From a sociological point of view, much speaks for regarding Baha'i as an independent religion and not as a derivative of Islam (Warburg 2006: 64–68).

### *Power, Prejudices and Persecutions*

The Babi insurrections in 1848 and a couple of years after were undoubtedly perceived by the shah regime as a revolutionary threat, but it would be too simple to regard them on a par with the European secular revolutionary movements of the time (Warburg 2006: 147–153). After the crushing of the Babi movement in 1852–1853, neither the Babis nor their successors, the Baha'is, presented any objective threat to the Iranian government. However, the Babis were never forgotten in *ulama* circles, and the Baha'is were seen as a continuation of the Babi movement nourished by imperialist powers

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[4] According to the Baha'i yearbook *The Bahá'í World 2004–2005*, p. 295.

[5] For example, in 1974 the World Muslim League unanimously adopted a resolution, which demanded that Ahmadiyyas should be "declared non-Muslims and ousted from the fold of Islam" (Bashir 1974). See also Arzt 1996.

hostile to Iran (MacEoin 1989: 6). As pointed out by Denis MacEoin, the Babi movement was essentially an expression of a conflict within orthodox Shi'a Islam, which ultimately led to a religious schism from which Baha'i evolved (MacEoin 1990). From the perspective of the *ulama* the Baha'is are therefore apostates, in addition to being agents of foreign imperialism.

During most of the history of Iran, the State and the *ulama* were separate and often conflicting pillars of power in society, but with the Iranian revolution in 1979, the two pillars of power merged into one totalitarian regime, which historically and doctrinally, was destined to be very hostile to the Baha'is (Amanat 2008; Arzt 1996). This created a new and qualitatively different situation for the Baha'is in relation to the Iranian State.

The new Islamic regime of 1979 soon initiated systematic persecutions of its Baha'i citizens with arbitrary arrests, confiscation or destruction of Baha'i property, torture and executions (Afshari 2008). The persecutions seriously drained the Baha'is in Iran of their human and financial resources: Thousands of Iranian Baha'i refugees sought new lives among the Baha'i communities of the West, and their fortunes and property were often left for confiscation. In fact, the persecutions of the Iranian Baha'is have had a profound demographic, economic, and cultural impact on the Baha'i communities both inside and outside Iran (Warburg 1995).

The first part of this chapter is an analysis of the relative power of the Baha'i minority in Iran, where I shall discuss not only their minority situation inside Iran, but also the consequences of the fact that the Baha'i leadership resides outside Iran and that the far majority of Baha'is today are non-Iranians. The second and larger part of this chapter deals with an analysis of the persecutions, their doctrinal justification by the *ulama*, and the popular prejudices against the Baha'is. Among Muslims, and in particular among the Shi'a of Iran, anti-Baha'i sentiments and reactions constitute an analogy to European anti-Semitism, albeit less widespread and less known (Chehabi 2008).[6] Like European anti-Semitism, the public and popular anti-Baha'i discourse tells more about the persecutors and their audience than about the persecuted. By analysing the persecutions of the Baha'is of Iran and their foundation in religious and popular prejudices we can therefore also obtain an insight which points to important aspects of Shi'ite self-images.

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[6]  Outside Iran, anti-Baha'i attitudes and activities have been reported in several other countries with a Muslim majority, notably Egypt (U.S. Department of State 2008).

*Sources*

The presented examples of prejudices and persecutions against the Baha'is of Iran are based on many and varied sources. The primary written sources are documentary material in the form of official documents, letters, and newspaper articles from Iran. In 1980–1982, I received a considerable amount of such early documentary material on the persecutions from Iranian Baha'is in Denmark, and many of these documents were translated with the help of my informants and published in Danish together with the Persian originals (Warburg 1985). Some of the examples in this book were later rendered in English (Warburg 2006). In the same period I conducted in-depth interviews with 20 expatriate Iranian Baha'is about their personal experiences of discrimination and persecutions back in Iran.[7] Many of these informants also contributed with a number of second-hand accounts of persecutions. During my fieldwork at the Baha'i World Centre, Haifa in 1988–89, I also interviewed about 10 Iranian Baha'is on the same topics. The interviews added significant, confirmatory details to the overall picture derived from the written sources.

An early report on the persecutions was issued by the London-based Minority Rights Group (Cooper 1982). The most extensive report was issued in 2006 by the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center in New Haven, Connecticut (*A Faith Denied* 2006).[8] The many other secondary sources include different international reports, in particular UN reports, reports issued by the International Baha'i Community, and a range of academic works on the topic. These sources are referred to where they are relevant.

Clearly, individual sources may be biased, but the evidence for the harsh persecutions of the Baha'is of Iran since 1979 is overwhelming and has not been disputed by independent observers. Iranian authorities have also themselves at several instances declared that the Baha'is are not to be tolerated in the Islamic Republic of Iran (Sanasarian 2000: 114–123). The persecutions have regularly been denounced in international forums,

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[7]  These interviews were carried out in connection with a more comprehensive qualitative and qualitative interview study of the Danish Baha'i community.

[8]  According to its homepage, the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center is an independent organisation with a Board of Directors comprising internationally recognized human rights experts and advocates, both Iranians and non-Iranians. The funding is varied, mostly private funds from the United States and Canada. It is clear that the center is not associated with the International Baha'i Community.

primarily in the United Nations, seriously contributing to Iran's bad standing with regard to human rights in general (United Nations General Assembly 2008).

### Empowerment and Disempowerment: Compact and Diffuse Minorities

In the introductory chapter in *Minorities and the State in the Arab World*, political scientist Gabriel Ben-Dor discusses the issue of power and powerlessness of the minorities in the Middle East (Ben-Dor 1999). He draws a distinction between what he denotes *compact* minorities and *diffuse* minorities—a terminology he borrowed from Albert Habib Hourani (1947: 14). A compact minority lives mainly in a geographically limited area, and here it may make up a significant proportion of the local population. A typical example of a compact minority is the Druze community in Lebanon. The position as a compact minority can give a certain base of power locally, and this power can be exercised to give the minority a considerable influence on the often relatively weak states of the Middle East (Ben-Dor 1999). As the term implies, a diffuse minority lives scattered over a larger area, and it is not demographically dominant anywhere. In the Middle East the Greek-Orthodox and the Armenians are examples of diffuse minorities. All other things being equal, a diffuse minority is in a less powerful position compared with the situation of a compact minority.

### The Issue of Power Regarding the Baha'i Minority in Iran

In Iran the Baha'is must be characterised as a diffuse minority. This goes back to the time of the Babi movement, which was not a local movement but spread in the 1840s like a wild-fire over most of Iran. Although there were cities, such as Mashad, Yazd, and Zanjan, which were known as particular Babi strongholds, the Babis seemed in general to be of a very mixed background (Momen 1983). Geographically, they came from all parts of Iran, and they represented most of the Iranian society with respect to occupation (ibid.). Underrepresented groups among the Babis were primarily the nomadic tribes, who, at that time, made up one quarter of the Iranian population (Smith and Momen 1986). When the majority of the surviving Babis later rallied around Baha'u'llah's leadership and became Baha'is, they were thus already living as a diffuse minority in Iran.

Baha'u'llah was in exile in the Ottoman Empire when, in 1863–1867, he proclaimed himself to be a new prophet and transformed Babism into the

Baha'i religion. He and his successors never returned to Iran but gradually established a Baha'i world leadership in exile. By a coincidence of history, this was in the area of Akko and Haifa in present-day Israel, because the Ottoman authorities had arrested Baha'u'llah in 1868 and transferred him to this then remote part of the Empire. This explains why the Baha'i World Centre today is situated on the northern slope of Mount Carmel in the city of Haifa. That the Baha'i headquarters is in Israel adds another twist to the relationship between the Baha'is and the Islamic Republic of Iran, as will be expounded on later.

Thanks to an effective network of couriers, Baha'u'llah kept contact with his adherents in Iran, and during the 1870s and 1880s, the Baha'is of Iran gradually gained a firm position in most parts of Iran (Momen 1998). They began to gain new followers, in particular among the better-educated or upwardly mobile strata of Iranian society (Smith 1987: 93–97). The Baha'is also had some success in gaining converts among other religious minority groups in Iran, specifically among Zoroastrians and Jews (Smith 1987: 93–97; Stiles 1984; Vahman 2008; Fischel 1934).

### *The External Power Base of the Baha'is of Iran*

In an empowerment perspective it was undoubtedly a great help to the Baha'i community of Iran that the supreme leadership of the Baha'i religion was in exile and therefore enjoyed the protection of other powerful states in the Middle East—first the Ottoman Empire, then the British during the mandate period and, lastly, Israel. When the persecutions were intensified after 1979, the Baha'is had already gained a strong resource base outside Iran, and Baha'is worldwide could support the Iranian Baha'is by publicly raising the issue of the persecutions and urging their governments to protest. This has had an effect: since 1979 the UN Commission on Human Rights has passed 18 resolutions on human rights violations in Iran, all mentioning the Baha'is, and since 1985, the UN General Assembly has approved 13 resolutions (Warburg 2006: 165). As late as 30 March 2009, Canada's House of Commons unanimously condemned the persecution of Baha'is in Iran and called on the Iranian government to release Baha'i leaders imprisoned in Tehran (Canada House of Commons 2009). Most observers agree that the appeals directed by the international community and the news media to Iran, calling for an end to the persecutions, have not been without effect (Affolter 2005). However, although the killings and executions seem to have come to a halt, the harassment of the Baha'is continues, and it has even been intensified during 2008 and 2009, with expulsions of Baha'i students,

arbitrary arrests, destruction of property, etc. (United Nations General Assembly 2008; United Nations General Assembly 2009).

The Baha'i representation at the United Nations has played a crucial role in providing documentation for the persecutions (*The Bahá'í Question* 1993; *The Bahá'í Question* 2005). So, although the Baha'is, as a diffuse and relatively small minority in Iran, can appear powerless, they are not totally so in reality, thanks to their strong presence and political contacts outside Iran. Because the Baha'i supreme leadership historically has been located outside Iran, the Baha'is of Iran are accustomed to the international Baha'i community speaking on their behalf. Iranian Baha'is are also well-represented on the supreme board of leaders of the Baha'is, the Universal House of Justice in Haifa, and among the high ranking staff. So there is little doubt that the international lobbyism is well coordinated with the interests of the Baha'i community of Iran.

Nevertheless, the fact that the Baha'is of Iran constitute a diffuse minority makes it difficult for them to mobilise strong local support. As scattered, individual families the Baha'is are vulnerable to informers and to mob persecutions.

### *Prejudices, Discrimination and Self-Images*

It is well-known in both sociology and social psychology that prejudices and discriminatory attitudes toward a minority reveal, among other things, self-images and prevailing norms among those who express these attitudes (Greenberg et al. 2009). Typically, the minority is stereotyped to incarnate negative projections of virtues esteemed by the majority (Pickering 2001: 69–78). In a broad sense stereotyping is a way for outsiders to condense perceived characteristics of a sub-group, whether these characteristics reflect a reality or not. In principle, stereotyping might be an unbiased characterization; however, in most cases stereotyping serves to picture the sub-group as inferior.

The underlying psycho-social mechanism of stereotyping is quite general. In cases where people classify other people as belonging either to their own kind, the in-group, or to an out-group, members of the in-group often enhance their self-esteem by derogating the out-group in generalised terms, thereby highlighting the (assumed) positive qualities of their own group (Greenberg et al. 2009). It should be added that it works both ways; also minorities have negative prejudices about the majority—prejudices that primarily are negations of virtues that the minority members perceive to

share among themselves. Stereotypes, prejudices, discriminatory attitudes and persecutions may therefore be analysed as cultural mirrors of self-understanding.

Such mirror stereotyping is quite common and not particular to majority-minority relations in the Middle East, as the following brief example from European history will show. Religion also has a prominent position in this case.

The French and the Germans fought three major wars against each other before World War II: The War of Liberation 1813–15, the Franco-Prussian War 1870–71, and World War I (1914–18). During these wars Protestant pastors all over Germany held patriotic sermons directed against the moral defects of the French and contrasted them with the high morals of the Germans. The historian A.J. Hoover has analysed hundreds of these sources and found that the virtues claimed by the Protestant clergy to be held by the Germans were nearly always the opposite of the vices of the French (Hoover 1987). The virtues of the Germans were said to stem from a basic religious attitude and the vices of the French from an irreligious attitude. When Hoover summed up the priestly contemplations on national characters, a colourful contrast emerged:

> the French were irreligious, godless people; this infidelity caused them to be lustful, sexually loose, superficial and frivolous, proud, vain and arrogant, sly, tricky and dishonest. The Germans in contrast were a religious, spiritual people, a basic fact that caused them to be honest, serious, upright and faithful, chaste and simple in tastes, frugal, industrious and skillful, brave, honourable, obedient and patriotic (Hoover 1987: 304).

Stereotypes and prejudices are often upheld against objective knowledge, and counterexamples exemplified by concrete out-group members are usually regarded as exceptions that prove the rule (Gaertner and Dovidio 2009). It is also commonly observed that negative images of a particular group prevail also among those who do not have any contact with the group. An illustrative example is that anti-Semitism in Poland is still common long after about 90 percent of the three million Jews in Poland were killed in World War II.[9]

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[9]  Nearly all of the rest of the Polish Jews emigrated after an anti-Jewish purging campaign in 1968, but Polish anti-Semitism did not disappear with them.

*Persecutions and the Baha᾿is' Relations to the Iranian* Ulama

While the Baha᾿i relations with the Iranian State gradually improved from the 1880s and until the fall of the Pahlavi regime in 1979, the tensions between the Baha᾿is and the Iranian *ulama* were lasting. The Babis were themselves strong opponents of the Iranian *ulama*, and the Baha᾿is maintained pronounced anti-*ulama* sentiments in line with their doctrinal abolishment of any kind of priesthood. The Baha᾿i leaders have repeatedly expressed anti-clerical views, and the *ulama* have been denounced in Baha᾿i literature with words such as "tyrants", "vipers" and "wolves who had destroyed Iran" (MacEoin 1989: 18). Baha᾿u᾿llah also resorted to the classical accusation of greed:

> Many ecclesiastics in Persia have, through innumerable designs and devices, been feeding on illicit gains obtained by usury. They have contrived ways to give its outward form a fair resemblance of lawfulness (Baha᾿u᾿llah 1988: 134).

The *ulama*, on their side, have succeeded in maintaining and spreading anti-Baha᾿i feelings in Iranian society. The tensions between the two parties often led to local persecutions and even occasional lynching of Baha᾿is, but in general these persecutions were not actively encouraged by the State. In fact, during the Pahlavi regime (1925–1979), the Baha᾿is enjoyed longer periods of relative tolerance (MacEoin 1989: 19–24). The Baha᾿is were generally better educated than the average Iranian, and many Baha᾿is found employment within the educational and health care sectors. Some even gained high posts in business and state administration (Chehabi 2008).

Despite their gradual appeasement with the Iranian government the Baha᾿i position in Iran was often threatened because of the continued, general popular hostility against them, with periods of relative tolerance interrupted by periods of mob persecutions, arbitrary arrests, and killings (Momen 1986). In 1903 widespread persecutions took place, with mob riots and fatal assaults on Baha᾿is in several cities (Amanat 2008; Momen 1981: 389–390). Furthermore, it did not improve the Baha᾿is' situation that, although they were sympathetic towards democratic reform in Iran, they did not speak out against the unpopular shah regime during the constitutional revolution of 1905 and its aftermath, but attempted to navigate along a course of non-involvement (Milani 2008).

Also in 1955, nation-wide persecutions broke out again, instigated by a number of *ulama* associated with Ayatollah Khomeini (*A Faith Denied* 2006: 7–10). Baha᾿i centres were demolished, Baha᾿i property was looted,

and Baha'is were molested, raped, some killed and their dead bodies mutilated.[10]

There is no doubt that the rise of the Baha'is to middle class positions during the last shah has made them appear as supporters of the regime in the eyes of many Iranians. The 1955 pogrom against the Baha'is showed that anti-Baha'i feelings in the Iranian population were strong and widespread (Akhavi 1980: 76–90). When representatives of the *ulama* came to power with the Iranian revolution of 1979, these feelings were exploited once more and as vigorously as ever.

### The Legal Status of the Baha'is in the Islamic Republic

The legal situation of the Iranian Baha'is changed drastically with the Iranian Revolution of 1979, which gave the legal system of the country a stronger reference to religious law. For example, the judicial expression for 'illegal', *gheir-e qanooní*, which literally means 'without law' in general, was changed to *na-mashruʿ*, which refers to something that is illegal according to shariʿa (Warburg 1985: 14–25). Both words are in common use, but by changing the term, it is stressed that offenders are not only offenders of any law; they have violated the law of Islam. This is an effective stereotyping of the Baha'is as a religious out-group versus the in-group of the Muslim majority.

From the perspective of the *ulama*, the Baha'is are regarded as apostates from Islam and, therefore, have violated the law of Islam (MacEoin 1989: 4; Arzt 1996; Sanasarian 2000: 122).[11] This is founded in the Babis' official break with Islam in 1848 as mentioned above. Crucial to this schism was a meeting between several of the leading Babis in the summer of 1848 (the Bab himself was imprisoned at that time). For several days they debated whether the Babis should break with Islam or not; in the end the majority decided to declare the abrogation of shariʿa, and recognised the Bab as a source of new revelation (Amanat 1989: 325–328). According to a Baha'i historical narrative, Baha'u'llah played a key role in reaching this conclusion (Shoghi Effendi 1974: 292–298). The account of Baha'u'llah's significance

[10]  This can be seen from a survey of *A Basic Baháʾí Chronology* for the year 1955 (Cameron and Momen 1996: 320–327).

[11]  As remarked by Denis MacEoin, it does not seem clear, however, if Baha'i converts from Zoroastrian or Jewish background also are regarded as apostates in terms of Islamic law (MacEoin 1989: 4).

for this early radical break with Islam established a doctrinal continuity between the Babi movement and the Baha'i religion, which is emphasised also in later official Baha'i expositions of the religion (Shoghi Effendi 1995: 32–33; Hatcher and Martin 1989: 29-30).

In classical Islamic penal code apostasy is considered an offense against God, and in practice it was often punished by death (Arzt 1996). So the Iranian government had its religious arguments for a harsh treatment of its Baha'i citizens, and these arguments were soon codified by law. Thus, in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which was drafted in 1979, it was specifically mentioned in Article 13 that Zoroastrians, Jews and Christians—the Peoples of the Book—were the only recognised religious minorities (Ghanea-Hercock 2002: 102–103).[12] In principle these *dhimmis* (i.e. non-Muslim religious minorities) enjoyed protection of the Islamic State and were free to cultivate their own religion (Sanasarian 2000: 19–21; Arzt 1996). Government officials, including Khomeini himself, explicitly excluded the Baha'is from this category, denouncing them as a harmful political faction whose religious activities were not to be tolerated (Sanasarian 2000: 20–22; *A Faith Denied* 2006: 20).

The Iranian Baha'is' inferior legal status may be exemplified by the so-called 'blood money', which is an economic compensation to be paid by the offender to the relatives of a crime victim.[13] However, if the victim is a Baha'i, the relatives of the victim are not entitled to this compensation. For example, in a court case involving a Muslim who had killed two Baha'is by careless driving, the judge ruled that "blood money is not applicable to them [the Baha'is]."[14] Underlying the law of 'blood money' is the view that Muslims are superior humans to those who are regarded to have rejected Islam.

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[12]  Also during the time of the shah, Baha'i was not one of the recognised religions, and according to the law, only members of recognised religions could be employed by the State. However, in that period, the law was not applied strictly and many Baha'is were employed by the government as mentioned above (Cooper 1982: 14).

[13]  The tradition was that if the victim was a Christian, a Jew, a Zoroastrian, or a woman, the payment to the relatives was only half of the amount given to the relatives of a male Muslim victim. However, in 2003 a law was passed that provided equal compensation for male Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians (*Payvand's Iran News* 27 December 2003).

[14]  Translation from the Persian of the Ruling of the Public Court (District One) in Minu-Dasht, 10 March 2002. Enclosure, Lise Raben (the Danish Baha'i community) to Margit Warburg, 13 November 2002.

*State-Organised Persecution of Baha'is*

One of the most efficient ways to persecute people is to deprive them of opportunities of education and employment through ministerial decrees and other "legal" measures. Such means provide an additional advantage for the regime in that such harassment draws less international attention than does physical persecution. Baha'i students and professors were barred from admission to or employment at any university in Iran according to a decree issued in 1979 shortly after the revolution (Warburg 1985: 77–87; *The Baha'i Question* 2005: 24–25; *A Faith Denied* 2006: 20). In response, the Baha'is established their own higher education programme in private, called the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education. In 1998, 36 of the voluntary faculty members of the "institute" were arrested in cities across the country (*The Baha'i Question* 1993: 61–64).

   Already from 1979, the government began to dismiss Baha'i civil servants and teachers without compensation (Cooper 1982: 13; Warburg 1985: 33–75). According to Baha'i sources all Baha'i public servants had been dismissed by 1982, and the pensions of retired Baha'i civil servants had been terminated (*The Baha'i Question* 1993: 31). Some of the dismissed persons were even told to repay the salaries they had received during their lifetime employment (*A Faith Denied* 2006: 43–44). These measures were followed by attacks on Baha'is in the private sector, where the trading licenses of Baha'i businesses were revoked, the assets of businesses run by Baha'is were confiscated, bank accounts of Baha'i businessmen were frozen, and Baha'i farmers were denied admission to farmers' co-operatives (Warburg 1985: 33–75; *A Faith Denied* 2006: 43–45).

   The leading role of the Iranian government in inflicting physical persecutions of the Baha'is, such as destruction of property, arbitrary arrests, torture and executions is well-documented and has naturally been a main point in the many international protests against Iran's gross violation of human rights (Cooper 2002 *passim*; Warburg 1985 *passim; A Faith Denied* 2006: 23–39).

*Popular Anti-Baha'i Sentiments*

*Nationalism, and Anti-Western Attitudes*

The official persecutions of the Baha'is are nourished by widespread popular prejudices against Baha'is and other non-Muslim minorities. Political scientist Eliz Sanasarian writes that common prejudices against Baha'is are

"apostasy, association with the West and Israel, pro-monarchism, and an elite club bent on self-promotion and propaganda" (Sanasarian 2000: 53). These prejudices reflect to some extent a reaction against the westernisation during the last shah—a reaction that eventually brought the *ulama* to power in 1979. The accusations against the Baha'is as associates of the West and Israel perpetuate earlier accusations that the Baha'is were instruments of British conspiracies against Iran (Vahman 2005). In fact, much of the material from the persecutions of the Baha'is plays on popular nationalism and anti-Western attitudes.

An example of the nationalistic arguments against the Baha'is is an early letter (dated 29 July 1979) from the provincial government of Sirján to a local agricultural cooperative, urging the management to dismiss a Baha'i from the cooperative. The letter, which states that it has been discussed in the local council of "pious and reliable men", characterises the Baha'i religion as follows:

> Baha'i is not a religion, nor is it a sect or philosophical school; it is not even a creed. The Baha'is are lackeys created by the assistants of the imperialist Russian Czars, and the Englishmen's aggressive and deceitful policy has helped them, and the bitter and ugly fruits of this unclean tree are plucked by America and Israel. Baha'i is the fifth column of imperialism in Iran, and it is obvious that the adherents of this misguided sect definitely are *mushrik* [polytheists], and that they represent from an intellectual point of view some of the worst imaginable reactionary tendencies of the twentieth century (translated from Warburg 1985: 71–73).

These accusations carefully play on prevalent sentiments among many Iranians—sentiments that are rooted in the humiliations of Iran during the nineteenth century by the combined efforts of Britain and Russia and which made it possible for the Pahlavi shahs to cultivate a strong Iranian nationalism (Vahman 2005). All Iran's traditional and new enemies are lined up in the quotation above, and the fact that the Baha'i world headquarters is situated in Haifa gives public credibility to accusations that Baha'is are agents of Israel. Accusations of being the fifth column of imperialism indicate that Baha'is are regarded as internationalists and traitors of Iran. This is a well-known prejudice, also before the Islamic revolution (Vahman 2005; Tavakoli-Targhi 2008). The implications are, of course, that Iranian Muslims themselves are nationalists and stand up against the enemies of Iran. This implicit characterisation of "good" Iranians as being both nationalistis and true Muslims should be seen in the light of the fact that, when the above letter was written in July 1979, nationalistic liberal groups still played an important role in the revolutionary government (Cottam 1989). Later, the liberal forces were ousted by Khomeini, but the nationalistic and

anti-imperialistic appeal to the public was retained, undoubtedly in tune with popular sentiments in Iran (ibid.).

In the surge of accusations against the Baha'is the Iranian authorities do not always seem consistent in their view of the Baha'is as political or religious opponents to the Islamic Republic: In the letter above Baha'i is first described as not being a sect or not even a creed, but a little later these "adherents of this misguided sect definitely are *mushrik* [polytheists]", which clearly places them as religious opponents.

Another illustrative example of the above ambiguity in the official views of the Baha'is is from the leading, conservative Tehran newspaper, *Kayhan* 16 July 1980. It reproduces the verdicts from the Islamic Revolutionary Court in Tabriz, which led to the execution of 14 persons, including two Baha'is. One of the verdicts runs like this:

> Yad'ullah Astani, son of Ahmad and chair of the Baha'i council in Tabriz is accused of having collaborated actively with the rotten Pahlavi-regime and the now dissolved SAVAK [the secret police of the shah regime] with the purpose of oppressing the fighting Muslims. He is charged with spreading prostitution, undertaking other unforgivable things, and having direct connection with the occupying power in Israel [i.e., the Israeli government] and international Zionism, with the purpose of oppressing noble Muslims anew. He is further charged with sending detailed reports with cultural, political, geographical and military information to Israel, to collect money and transfer it in support of Israel, to rebel against Islam and the Muslims by direct collaboration with Israel, and to have travelled frequently to Israel to accomplish the ominous plans of Zionism. He is condemned as an opponent of God and the Messenger of God, and he is thus the corruption of the world (translated from Warburg 1985: 134–137).

It is interesting that the pronounced anti-Zionism is intertwined with the charges of being a potential suppressor of the Muslims and an opponent of God. The verdict concludes that Yad'ullah Astani is the "corruption of the world", and this is a crime which implies a death sentence (United Nations General Assembly 2009: 9).

The above examples illustrate that the official propaganda against the Baha'is seems to operate along two tracks. Part of the propaganda openly appeals to those who oppose the Baha'is for religious reasons. For example, in 2005 the newspaper *Kayhan* brought a series of articles criticising and defaming the Baha'i religion and its leading figures right back to its first prophet, the Bab, who was attacked in several articles (*A Faith Denied* 2006: 50–51). Such a reference to a religious schism, which took place 160 years ago, is obviously addressing the *ulama* and the broad circle of more or less self-appointed religious specialists among the supporters of the regime.

However, the government is also aware that most people do not care much about theological finesses rooted in historical events. Appeals to anti-Zionist and anti-Western attitudes are likely to reach a wider audience in Iran, and other *Kayhan* articles therefore devote a fair share of words on claims that Baha'is are the fruits of Israeli and Western imperialist influence (*A Faith Denied* 2006: 50–51).

The stereotyping of the Baha'is as agents of Western imperialism is in concord with popular anti-Baha'i feelings rather than possible popular animosities against Westerners in general. A study of stereotypes held by different social groups in Iran in 1980 showed that stereotypes of Americans were generally favourable (Beattie, Agahi, and Spencer 1982). The authors conclude that the rather intense anti-Western propaganda in the first years after the revolution had not resulted in negative attitudes towards Westerners in general. The study also showed that Arabs were viewed unfavourably, being stereotyped as "lazy" and "happy-go-lucky"—just as black Americans were stereotyped by white Americans in the 1930s. Anti-Arab sentiments run deeply in Iranian society, nourished by the rise of Iranian nationalism in the early twentieth century (Vahman 2005).

*Muslim Morals*

Baha'is have often been met in court with charges of prostitution, adultery and immorality. These charges were formally founded in the fact that until recently the Iranian authorities did not recognise Baha'i marriages as legal marriages, and their children were considered illegitimate. In the logic of the *ulama* the Baha'i couple had an extra-matrimonial relationship, which is religiously forbidden (Cooper 1982: 14). Behind these charges are general prejudices about the Baha'is' bad or absent morale (MacEoin 1989: 4–5). Most Iranians know very little about the Baha'is, and all kinds of rumours circulate. Some of the most stubborn rumours tell that Baha'i families have incestuous relations: Father and daughter, and mother and son sleep together (Warburg 1985: 20).

The Baha'i doctrine and practice about equality of the sexes further nourishes the imagination. One of the quite common rumours is that Baha'i assembly meetings are in reality group sex parties (MacEoin 1989: 5). A more fanciful variation of that rumour is that when the Baha'is have an assembly meeting, they turn off the lights. Then, the men put on the women's clothes and the women put on the men's clothes (Warburg 1985: 20)! This rumour may reflect that in many Muslim countries cross-dressing is controversial: for example in December 2007 the Kuwaiti parliament

amended the penal code to make cross-dressing illegal (Whitaker 2008). Obviously, the rumour implies that decent behaviour with regard to the opposite sex is part of Muslim moral. Such prejudices about the sexual immorality of minority groups are common in many societies.

### The Case of the Anti-Baha'i Society in Yazd

The public animosity against the Baha'is is also channelled into private organisations, of which the Iranian anti-Baha'i society, called *Hujjatiyeh*, is the most important. In the following I shall give an example of the activities of this organisation, which was founded in the 1950s and became widely represented among the *ulama* (Vali and Zubaida 1985).

As part of a rare autobiography, Iranian Mehdi Abedi tells about his own joining of the local branch of the anti-Baha'i society in Yazd, when he was a young, enthusiastic student before the revolution (Fischer and Abedi 1990: 50).

> I did not know much about Baha'is before this time. Children in the alleys would sometimes chant, *Tū pīr-e bābi ridam* ("I shit on the Babi saint"), and my father had told me that the "Babis" (he did not distinguish Babis and Baha'is) did not say their prayers, and were *najes* (impure).

When Abedi's father said that the Baha'is did not say their prayers, he implied that proper Muslims did. Abedi's father also said that he regarded the Baha'is as impure, implicating that he, himself, was religiously pure. The concept of religious impurity, *najes*, is very important in Iranian society, and I shall expound on this in the subsequent section.

The local branch of the *Hujjatiyeh* society in Yazd operated from a mosque across the street from the Baha'i centre, and its strategy was to recruit young men to infiltrate the Baha'i community, pretending to be potential converts. Abedi describes, for example, how he befriended a young Baha'i man and abused his friendship by stealing a rare Baha'i book that he did not return, despite the pleas of his friend (Fischer and Abedi 1990: 52–53).

Shortly after the revolution the activities of the *Hujjatiyeh* society indirectly led to the execution of one of the leaders of the Yazdi Baha'is, Nurullah Akhtar-Khavari, (Fischer and Abedi 1990: 49). The execution was filmed for television, but when it was discovered that the viewers were repulsed by the scene, the broadcast was suppressed (Fischer and Abedi 1990: 49). The local leader of the *Hujjatiyeh* society, Dr. Paknejad had received private tutorials in English from Akhtar-Khavari, but Paknejad did not use his influence to prevent the killing. The Baha'is here again suffered from being a

diffuse minority, and even in Yazd, which historically was one of the centres of the Babi movement, the Baha'is were obviously defenceless.

In 1983 the *Hujjatiyeh* society was banned and went underground, but in the beginning of the 21st century the organisation has resurfaced, and it seems to attract support also from the upper strata of Iranian society (Radio Free Europe 2004). The Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is claimed to fraternise with the anti-Baha'i society (Hughes 2005).

## Najes

The concept of religious purity/impurity may be traced back to pre-Islamic Zoroastrism, and the question of pollution (*nejasat*) is much more elaborated among the Shi'ites than among the Sunnis (Sanasarian 2000: 23–24). It became more widespread in Iranian society with the writings of the Shi'ite theologian, Muhammad Baquer Majlesis (d. 1699) who prescribed the rules for how Muslims should behave in the presence of non-Muslims (Sanasarian 2000: 23–24). Non-Muslims are *najes*, which means that physical contact with a non-Muslim, or food or drink from a non-Muslim should be avoided. For example, a Baha'i refugee told in an interview that when he had been arrested together with other Baha'is and transferred to an interrogation centre, the wardens called them *najes*, and they tried to avoid touching the prisoners for this reason (Gilad 1989). Even indirect contact may pollute; for example, it has been reported that a Muslim, after receiving money from a Jew, washed the unclean Jewish money before he could have it in his pocket (Fischel 1934).

The codes of pollution vary considerably, both locally and socially, and they have had significant consequences not only for the Baha'is, but also for other non-Muslim groups in Iran. I shall give a few brief examples in the following—the two first are from Eliz Sanasarian's book, the next two from my own informants:

1) After the Islamic revolution, non-Muslim food store owners such as bakers or sandwich-sellers had to put up signs, "especially for minorities" as a warning to Muslims (Sanasarian 2000: 86).
2) The Armenian owned Coca-Cola factory was confiscated, and the Armenian workers were fired and replaced by Muslims. The reason was that non-Muslims could not touch the bottles or their contents (Sanasarian 2000: 84–85).
3) One of my own informants told me about a *mullah* who had confiscated an apartment from a wealthy Baha'i family. Before he took over the apartment, he had to make it religiously clean. Relatives and friends

to the unfortunate Baha'i family could watch while he had the whole apartment including all the furniture and carpets washed with a fire hose (Warburg 1985: 19).

4) Another of my informants was a female high school student. She told me that all the students in her school in Iran had been asked to give blood to the wounded soldiers from the Iran-Iraqi war. When she heard about the need for blood, she immediately went to the school nurse to get an appointment for the next day. However, the class prefect had talked to the teacher about it, and they had agreed that her unclean Baha'i blood should not be offered to the Muslim soldiers (Warburg 1985: 19).

The belief underlying these and many other accounts is that religious impurity is contagious. Muslims who have a self-image of representing religious purity must therefore protect themselves from all contact with the impure.

These reports are not exotic cases; in fact, they follow typical patterns of how people deal with religious purity and impurity—a dichotomy that is ubiquitous in, for example, traditional Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and Zoroastrism. Such religious classificatory systems are deeply rooted in tradition. According to my informants many Muslim Iranians ridicule the concept of *najes*, which they claim is only believed by uneducated peasants and the city proletariat. Nevertheless, incidents like the above are known to all Iranian Baha'is and have also occurred in situations among people from the middle class.

### Conclusion

Behind the present persecutions of the Baha'is in Iran there is a logic, which can be understood (but not excused, of course) on a complex historical background, where Islamic doctrines, popular religious beliefs, and nationalistic currents in Iran are mingled into a pêle-mêle of justifications for the anti-Baha'i stance of the regime. The relationship between the Iranian Baha'i community and the Iranian *ulama* was moulded during the Babi period, where the Babis broke with Islam in 1848. The Baha'is were a revival and continuation of the defeated Babi movement, and in religious terms the Baha'is continued the Babi track of heterodoxy and heresy relative to mainline Shi'ism and gradually developed a religion of their own. This was bound to result in permanent tensions between the Baha'is and the *ulama*, who logically enough regard the Baha'is as apostates.

The Babi insurrections following the schism in 1848 laid the foundation for the often strained relationship between the State and Baha'i community of Iran. Politically, the Baha'is attempted an appeasement with the Iranian State, and from the late nineteenth century and until the fall of the last shah in early 1979, the Baha'is were largely accepted by the government, and many Baha'is became employed in public service. However, the government also occasionally tolerated persecutions and harassments of the Baha'is, exploiting the widespread popular animosity and the prevalent ulama hostility against them. As a diffuse minority in Iran the Baha'is could not mobilise enough local support to resist persecutions but were vulnerable to informers, to mob harassments, and to anti-Baha'i organisations, such as the *Hujjatiyeh*.

The Baha'is' unstable balancing between the two pillars of power in Iranian society, the State and the *ulama*, was brought to an end with the Iranian revolution of 1979, where they merged into one totalitarian regime. The Islamic revolutionary government was very hostile to the Baha'is right from the take-over of power, and soon the government unleashed widespread, organised persecutions of its Baha'i citizens, including dismissal of thousands of Baha'i public servants, arrests, torture and executions of representatives of the Baha'i leadership.

Like other historical examples of state-organised persecutions, the persecutions of the Baha'is of Iran follow a common pattern: The minority is stereotyped in negative terms, utilising existing, more or less diffuse, prejudices among the majority population, and the persecutions are justified by reference to the imaginary threats posed by such potentially subversive elements. The persecutions of the Baha'is are both in tune with, and also extreme extrapolations of, widespread sentiments and prejudices against Baha'is among the Muslim majority in Iran. In the state-organised propaganda these prejudices are repeatedly and systematically projected into negative stereotypes of the Baha'is. In particular, the accusations of the Baha'is being disloyal to Iran and agents of Israel and the West strike a chord mirroring Iranian nationalism. Occasionally, the propaganda reminds the public that the Baha'is are also religious enemies of the Islamic Republic.

Stereotypes, prejudices, and discriminatory attitudes can be analysed as cultural mirrors of self-understanding. For example, there are popular prejudices in Iran depicting the Baha'is as immoral, irreligious, and religiously impure (*najes*), and these prejudices contrast with a self-image of Shi'ite Iranians being moral, pious and unpolluted. In particular, the understanding of the Baha'is as being *najes* gives many Shi'ites a reason

to understand why the Baha'is must be removed from positions within the teaching and medical professions.

State-orchestrated manipulations of popular prejudices as an argument for persecutions often serve a cynical purpose of diverting attention from governmental mismanagement. Although this motive cannot be ruled out, considering that the persecutions (except for the executions) have intensified during the period of the Ahmadinejad government, the selection of the Baha'is as prime scapegoats can only be understood by tracing the religious-historical origin of the *ulama* hostility against the Baha'is. With the *ulama* coming to power in 1979, history inevitably made the Baha'is the chosen internal enemy in Iran.

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PART II

MUSLIM MINORITIES

# SHI'I IDENTITY POLITICS IN SAUDI ARABIA

## Laurence Louër

### *Introduction*

The Saudi state was born as the result of the conquest, from the mid-eighteenth century on, of the major part of the Arabian Peninsula by the Al-Sa'ud, a clan originating from Najd in the centre of the peninsula. In order to legitimise their military enterprise, the latter presented themselves as the armed champions of a particularly strict version of Sunni orthodoxy, that articulated by Mohammed Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792). The latter advocated a return to strict monotheism and incited his followers to launch *jihad* against those who refused to comply with the commandments of "true Islam". In his mind, Shi'is were no less than false Muslims needing to be put back on the right track. He was particularly vocal against their practice of, as he deemed it, "worshipping" the Imams and other members of the Prophet Mohammed's family, which he considered to be a contradiction of the monotheist principle. Hence, the successive military campaigns that accompanied the formation of the Saudi State were regularly marked by the ransacking of Shi'i shrines and the slaughtering of Shi'i populations.[1]

In the final act of its creation in 1932, the Saudi State incorporated a sizeable Shi'i population. The majority of them inhabited the eastern parts of the newly-created kingdom, in the two oases of Qatif and Hasa. There was also a Shi'i minority in Medina, as well as a sizeable Ismaeli population in the city of Najran, located south east of the kingdom on the border with Yemen. The Shi'is probably represented the majority of the population of Qatif and Hasa in 1913, upon their final conquest by Abd al-Aziz, the founder of the modern Saudi State (Steinberg 2001: 236). Needless to say, the institution of Wahhabism as the Saudi State's official ideology put the

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[1] Among the most well known episodes are the destruction of Imam Husein's shrine in Karbala in 1802 and the killing of some 4,000 Shi'is there (Vassiliev 2000: 96–8); and the destruction of the Imams' mausoleums in Medina's Baqi' cemetery in 1925 (al-Hasan 1993: 208–12).

Shi'is in an uncomfortable situation, to say the least. While Abd al-Aziz quickly put an end to the exactions of Wahhabi zealots against them, the Shi'is nonetheless have continued to suffer from various types of discrimination until today. They have been severely restricted in the practice of their creeds, the regions they inhabit have been deliberately left underdeveloped, and they have been prevented from acceding to the most rewarding jobs. In this context, it is all the more natural for Saudi Shi'is systematically to play down their religious belonging in the everyday social intercourse with their Sunni fellow-citizens. The difference in routine religious behaviour between the regions of Qatif and Hasa is particularly revealing in this respect. In the city of Qatif and the surrounding villages which are entirely Shi'i or where the Shi'is represent the overwhelming majority, the muezzins call to prayer according to the Shi'i formula: "I testify that Mohammed is the Prophet of God and that Ali is the vice-regent (*wali*) of God".[2] People also celebrate many Shi'i rituals in public places. Processions of mourners lamenting the martyrdom of Imam Husein (the so-called 'Ashura ritual performed during the month of Muharram) march in the streets and, when time comes to celebrate the birth of the Hidden Imam in the middle of the month of Sha'ban (*nusf Sha'ban*), children disguised in fancy dresses go round the houses in their neighbourhood asking for money or candies. The picture is totally different in Hasa, located some 250 km south of Qatif, where estimates put the Shi'is at roughly fifty per cent of the total population. There, Shi'is are discreet and content themselves with practising their faith in the privacy of their homes or in their mosques and *huseiniyya*.[3] Typically Sunni Bedouin names are also widespread among Hasawi Shi'is, and many Shi'i clerics confess to preferring to go out without wearing their turbans.

As these examples show, the free expression of Shi'i identity in Saudi Arabia is reserved for what French sociology calls the "*entre soi*": that is, socially homogeneous contexts. However, for some years at the time of writing, the displaying of Shi'i identity has become possible in public debate. Shi'i figures express themselves on a regular basis in the local and national media, making open demands for the government to put an end to discrimination against their co-religionists and, overall, to improve their lot. Many of these figures are well-known Islamic activists who, in the

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[2] This information comes from my own observations during one month of fieldwork undertaken in Saudi Arabia in October 2004.

[3] A *huseiniyya* is a place initially devoted to the lamenting of Imam Husein's martyrdom but which also serves for marriage and burial ceremonies. It also functions as a community centre where, for example, people can attend computer lessons.

1980s, belonged to the Organisation of the Islamic Revolution in the Arabian Peninsula (OIRAP). As its name explicitly indicates, this organisation was devoted to the revolutionary overthrow of the Saudi regime. Having renounced their radical project, they are today engaged in typical 'identity politics': they act politically in order to affirm the Shi'is' distinctiveness and, by so doing, hope the Shi'is will be empowered. This strategy of empowerment through the affirmation of the Shi'is' difference is surprising if one is to considerer the overall political and social context I briefly described above. How do we explain that, on the one hand, the Shi'is resort to identity politics, while they favour discretion in the framework of their routine interactions with Sunnis on the other hand? What led them to think that this strategy was more rewarding than the discreet negotiation with the rulers they had long practised?

## The Institutionalisation of Shi'i Distinctiveness

Saudi Shi'is have traditionally been a rather silent minority, favouring 'exit' and 'loyalty' over 'voice'.[4] During the various Al-Sa'ud military campaigns, many Shi'is chose to leave for more hospitable areas rather than fighting. Hasawis, in particular, are known for having chosen this strategy of 'exit', so that today there is a Hasawi diaspora settled all around the Gulf's coast, in the little monarchies that escaped Saudi annexation (Kuwait hosts the largest Hasawi community), in southern Iran and southern Iraq (the region of Basra). In Qatif, when the army of Abd al-Aziz reached the city's walls in 1913, the notables debated which attitude to adopt. Those who favoured peaceful surrender got the upper hand while many of the others chose to leave for Bahrain and Iraq (Steinberg 2001: 244–245). Among the arguments brought by the partisans of peaceful surrender was that the Al-Sa'ud were a strong military power able to put an end to the exactions of the Bedouin tribes against Shi'i peasants and urban dwellers. Indeed, the Ottomans, who controlled Qatif and Hasa before the region's conquest by the Al-Sa'ud, had been unable to protect its inhabitants in 1908 when, enraged by the increased fiscal pressure and the Ottomans' refusal to let them collect their seasonal surplus of dates, Bedouins besieged Qatif and killed hundreds of civilians (Fuccaro 2008: 47–8). At this time, for many

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[4]  I am referring here to the concepts elaborated by Albert O. Hirschman, (1970).

Shiʻa notables the religious identity of the Al-Saʻud mattered less than their perceived capacity to bring stability.

In exchange for their conciliatory attitude, Abd al-Aziz granted the Shiʻis relative religious freedom. While the public expression of their creed was banned, the Shiʻi religious judges (*qadhi*) were authorised to continue their activities. Over the years, their position was institutionalised as they became civil servants appointed by the Ministry of Interior after consultation with the Shiʻi notables. Two Shiʻi religious courts were officially created, one in Qatif and one in Hufuf, mainly dealing with family matters, inheritance and administration of religious endowments. Up to the late 1970s, they were also entitled to give property certificates.[5] Shiʻi religious courts were left indigent in comparison with the Sunni ones, but the very fact of their existence indicates that, from the start, the Saudi kings were ready to grant the Shiʻis an amount of institutional recognition as a distinct sect (*madhhab*) within Islam. As underlined by Guido Steinberg, this signals a pragmatic approach that has been a constant feature of the Al-Saʻud's dealing with the Shiʻi question (Steinberg 2001: 237). They no doubt considered the Shiʻis with disdain, and even suspicion, but never endeavoured to convert them *en masse* to Sunni Wahhabi Islam because they were first and foremost driven by the concern of building a stable state. This meant avoiding alienation of the newly conquered populations and, hence, refusing implementation of the kind of radical religious policy of Wahhabisation advocated by the Wahhabi ulama. One should add that the stability of the kingdom's eastern regions, inhabited by the Shiʻis, was particularly essential because of their very dynamic economy. Not only did they have important agricultural production, but their port towns hosted intensive commercial activities. From 1938 on, when oil was discovered there in commercial quantities, it appeared that the Eastern Province was hosting the vast majority of the kingdom's hydrocarbon resources, and it became even more crucial to maintain the stability of the Shiʻi areas. Hence, while pressuring the Shiʻis has always been an easy way for the Al-Saʻud to please the Wahhabi religious establishment, in the case of conflict between the necessities of state-building and the ulama's ideological demands, they always arbitrated in favour of consolidating the state.

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[5] This information was collected during a personal interview with the *qadhi* of Qatif, Sheikh ʻAbdallah al-Khunaizi, carried out in Saudi Arabia in October 2004. In 2005, the entire Shiʻi religious court system was reshuffled. I will elaborate on this later on in the article.

One can give another explanation for this pragmatic approach. Abd al-Aziz was a political leader typical of pre-industrial society such as described by Ernest Gellner in his *Nations and Nationalism*: that is, a society where the ruling elite does not consider cultural homogenisation between rulers and ruled as necessary to secure their domination. In opposition to industrial society, which Gellner considers as structurally bound to generate nationalist ideologies that deem necessary the correspondence between political borders and cultural boundaries, political power in pre-industrial societies functions by maintaining the cultural difference between rulers and ruled. Since cultural difference is the symbolic expression of the power gap between rulers and ruled, from the point of view of the rulers it would be totally irrelevant to launch policies of cultural homogenisation: that is, in the specific Saudi context, policies of mass Wahhabisation. Hence, when the Wahhabi ulama, with the ethos typical of the clerical classes, pushed for such policies, they were logically rebuffed by the Al-Sa'ud. Contrary to the ulama who saw Wahhabism in a missionary perspective, the Al-Sa'ud considered it as the specific creed of the rulers, the sign of their moral distinction and the symbol of the legitimacy of their rule.

## Contention Within the New Middleclass

Up to the 1950s, Saudi Shi'is were content with the tacit pact of loyalty in exchange for relative peace of mind. When the first real structured opposition movement appeared, it did not articulate its criticisms of the regime in terms of defence of minority rights and a fight against the specific discrimination suffered by the Shi'is. On the contrary, it framed its demands in the universalistic grammar provided by the great political ideologies popular in the Arab world: Arab nationalism and communism. The diffusion of these ideologies among Saudi Shi'is was the result of the transformation of the Shi'i population's class structure, due to the Shi'is' extensive participation in the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO), the oil company operating on Saudi soil, initially owned and managed by Americans. As ARAMCO was located in the Eastern Province long inhabited by the Shi'is, the latter represented the bulk of the company's Saudi employees (Vassiliev 2000: 424). For the Shi'is, the presence of ARAMCO was a true opportunity. Indeed, despite the mediocre wages and working conditions on the oil fields, employment in ARAMCO permitted them to improve their lot. As ARAMCO's management realised that it was in its interest to secure a stable and loyal workforce among the local population,

it quickly undertook to train its Saudi employees, who therefore managed to climb the rungs of the ladder, including to managerial positions. One should add that in the absence of a developed state apparatus, ARAMCO turned into a kind of quasi-welfare state for its employees and their families, providing them with education, healthcare, and even housing loans. This is how a new middle class emerged from among the Shi'i population, which was exposed to leftist and Arab nationalist ideas imported to Saudi Arabia by ARAMCO foreign workers (Egyptians, Syrians, Lebanese but also Italians). A number of Shi'is enrolled in the National Reform Front, which emerged in 1953 from a labour movement within ARAMCO and which, in the 1970s, constituted the bulk of the activists of the Saudi Communist Party. Founded in 1975 by communist members of the National Reform Front, the Party demanded a constitution establishing a parliament and guaranteeing political pluralism. The Saudi Communist Party also demanded the nationalisation of the oil resources (Salameh 1980: 20).

Although they left a legacy of leftist political activism among Saudi Shi'is, these political organisations never developed into broad social movements and always had a narrow membership. Their relative success among the Shi'i population reflected the latter's particular exposure to the transnational ideological currents of the era, due to their strong presence among the oil industry's labour force, rather than a massively diffused will to organise in order to oppose the State. The situation was different with the diffusion of the Message Movement (*al-Haraka al-Risaliyya*) in Saudi Arabia from the mid-1970s onwards. Indeed, while it partly recruited its members from the same milieu as the Saudi Communist Party—that is, the new middle class that emerged from ARAMCO—the Message Movement had much better success at mobilising the Shi'is. Its success lay in its ability to make the conjunction between the new middle class and the older merchant and clerical classes, as well as linking the Saudi Shi'is' struggle with a geographically wider Shi'i political mobilisation.

*From Domestic to International Politics*

In order to understand what the Message Movement is, one needs to leave Saudi Arabia to glance at the developments that affected the Shi'i religious institution based in Iraq in the course of the 1960s. The need to make such a geographical detour shows that it is impossible to analyse the political evolution of Saudi Shi'is as if the latter were totally encapsulated within the borders of the Saudi state. Indeed, the ties Saudi Shi'is have with

co-religionists in other parts of the Middle East played a central role in their political re-orientation. Of particularly importance is their insertion within the centre-periphery pattern progressively established from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards in the framework of the centralisation of the *marja'iyya*, the supreme religious authority (Litvak 1998: 80–95). Located in southern Iraq, the city of Najaf became the place of residence of the *maraji' al-taqlid* (sing. *marja' al-taqlid*), the most knowledgeable of the Shi'i scholars, to whose rulings the laity and those clerics who had not reached the level of *ijtihad*[6] had to refer.[7] Clerics from all corners of the Shi'i world were trained in Najaf's seminaries, where they inserted themselves into the patronage networks woven around the *marja'iyya*. These networks continued to function after the students return home, where their legitimacy in the face of their local flock in great part rested on the delegation of authority endowed to them by the *marja'iyya*. The ties with Iraq were also maintained by the intensive practice of pilgrimage to the tombs of the members of the Prophet's family (*ahl al-bayt*), in particular the Imams whom the Shi'is consider as the legitimate successors of Mohammed. The most popular pilgrimage was to the city of Karbala, located some fifty miles north of Najaf, where in 680 CE the third Imam Husein and most of his family were massacred by the caliph's army. Last but not least, most of the Shi'is in the Arab world used to pay the *khoms*[8] to Najaf's scholars, either directly, by undertaking regular trips to the holy city, or through local intermediaries from the merchant and the clerical notability. When, from the 1930s onwards, the oil revenues progressively transformed the Gulf sheikhdoms into wealthy states with important per capita incomes, the ties between Iraq's religious institution and the Gulf Shi'is were considerably reinforced, the latter becoming chief contributors to the *marja'iyya*'s budget.

The centripetal attraction exerted by Iraq's religious institutions favoured political integration between Iraqi Shi'is and their co-religionists elsewhere in the Middle East. The diffusion of the Message Movement from Iraq to Saudi Arabia is only one example of this. The movement originates in the quarrel that developed in the course of the 1960s between the 'Shiraziyyin' and the Najafi religious establishment. The Shiraziyyin, literally the

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[6] The capacity to interpret the religious texts.

[7] The *marja'iyya* means literally the "source of emulation". On this institution, see Walbridge 2001.

[8] The specific Shi'i religious alms consisting of one-fifth of a family's yearly surplus.

'partisans of al-Shirazi', were initially a clerical faction aggregated around the charismatic figure of Mohammed al-Shirazi (1926–2001). Mohammed al-Shirazi established himself as Karbala's main religious leader at the beginning of the 1960s and then launched an all out campaign to accede to the status of *marjaʿ*. This was taken as an unacceptable challenge by Najaf's religious establishment, who dismissed the pretension of somebody seen as deliberately circumventing some of the tacit rules regulating the *marjaʿiyya*: he was much too young (in his thirties) and therefore allegedly not knowledgeable enough; moreover, he never studied in Najaf, having been trained in Karbala (Louër 2008: 88–96).

The creation of the Message Movement in the mid-1960s was initially one of the tools used by Mohammed al-Shirazi to consolidate his position in the struggle with the Najafis. In 1957, the latter had created a political party, al-Daʿwa (the Call), deeply inspired by the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood, to which it accommodated some of the main Shiʿi religious concepts. Headed by one of Mohammed al-Shirazi's nephews, Mohammed Taqi al-Mudarrisi (b. 1945), the Message Movement, like al-Daʿwa, aimed to fight the Iraqi regime and replace it by an Islamic state. But it was also marked by a strong transnational ethos, which made it look beyond Iraqi domestic politics to the oppressed Shiʿi communities in neighbouring countries, considered as part of a single transnational community. The actual realisation of this transnational calling into a concrete transnational religious and political practice was hastened when the movement became the target of the Iraqi regime's repression and was forced physically to redeploy itself to the neighbouring countries, in particular Kuwait. It was here that Mohammed al-Shirazi moved with the bulk of his family in 1971 and where he established several religious institutions that served not only to consolidate his position as a *marjaʿ* but also to recruit and ideologically train a whole generation of Shiʿi Islamic activists, mainly from Iraq and the Gulf (Louër 2008: 120–9).

Among them was a young Saudi cleric named Hasan al-Saffar (b. 1958). The latter had first met with Mohammed al-Shirazi during a trip he had undertaken to the Iraqi shrine cities with his father, a devout merchant of Qatif; his father used to pay regular visits to the religious scholars, to whom he paid the *khoms* directly. At this time, Hasan al-Saffar was already known in Qatif and the surrounding villages as "*Molla* Hasan", a preacher recounting the life of *ahl al-bayt* during the religious ceremonies. In 1974, after a stay in Najaf 's and Qom's (in Iran) seminaries, Hasan al-Saffar became one of the main propagandists of Mohammed al-Shirazi's ideas in the Gulf monarchies: Saudi Arabia, of course, but also Oman where he

spent several years. In Saudi Arabia, he created a branch of the Message Movement that was renamed the Organisation for the Islamic Revolution in the Arabian Peninsula (OIRAP) after its leadership went into exile in Iran by the end of 1979.[9] Militants of the OIRAP mainly came from two social milieus. On the one hand were people from the traditional notability— what Gilles Kepel calls the "devout bourgeoisie" (Kepel 1985)—and the clerical corporation, both having close ties to Iraq's religious institutions. On the other hand were people from the new middle class that emerged from the ranks of ARAMCO: students from the University of Petroleum and Minerals, which trained future ARAMCO cadres, and junior and mid-rank employees of the company.

The OIRAP made itself known after what Saudi Shi'is call the "Muharram 1400 Intifada", the uprising of November 1979 that occurred in Qatif and its vicinity during the Ashura celebrations that followed the Iranian revolution. Ignoring the ban forbidding them to celebrate their rituals in public, thousands of Shi'is went down to the streets to lament the martyrdom of Imam Husein in the cortèges of mourners dressed in black traditionally seen in Shi'i communities. The march quickly turned into a political demonstration when the mourners began raising portraits of Ruhollah Khomeyni and chanting slogans hostile to the regime (Jones 2006: 223). The confrontation with the police was harsh, with dozens of demonstrators killed and dozens of others arrested. Far from being a spontaneous upsurge of solidarity with the newly-established Islamic Republic of Iran, the demonstrations were carefully prepared by the OIRAP, which conceived them as the first step of a process of religious and political awareness-raising among the Shi'i population.

Indeed, the events represented a watershed in the history of the Shi'is' relation with the Saudi regime, which for the first time saw the potential for the constitution of a strong radical opposition movement with wide popular support from within the previously compliant Shi'i population. Something else made the shift even more dramatic: the positioning of Iran as the Shi'is' protector, and, as a result, the status change of the Shi'i issue in Saudi Arabia, which ceased to be only a Saudi domestic matter and became a geo-strategic issue. Indeed, quickly after the revolution, the new rulers of Iran began criticising Saudi Arabia as a corrupt regime pledged to the American "Great Satan" and promoting a distorted version of

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[9] While the Iraqi branch of the Message Movement took the name Islamic Action Organisation (*Munazzama al-ʿAmal al-Islami*).

Islam. A rivalry for the leadership of the Muslim world developed between the two countries, in which both resorted to sponsoring transnational politico-religious movements to expand their spheres of influence (Nasr 2006: 156–158).

## Exile Politics

The first episode of the trial of strength between Iran and Saudi Arabia, the 1979 uprising entailed a deep transformation of Shi'i Islamic activism in Saudi Arabia. Targeted by the regime, the bulk of OIRAP's leadership relocated to Iran. It was from Tehran that the movement officially revealed its existence and began publishing its mouthpiece, the title of which left no ambiguity about the organisation's political programme: *The Islamic Revolution* (*Al-Thawra al-Islamiyya*) (Fandy 1999: 198). The uprising thus transformed OIRAP from an embryonic, clandestine cell into an opposition movement in exile. Exile favoured the reinforcement of the movement's transnational ethos by prompting it to embrace the Iranian regime's rhetoric about global revolution against the unjust rulers. Together with their Iraqi mentors, OIRAP militants made themselves ardent proponents of the political model embodied by the Islamic Republic of Iran; in this model, according to the *wilayat al-faqih* (government by the specialists in religious law) doctrine articulated by Ruhollah Khomeyni, supreme political authority is vested in the clerics. At this stage, revolution in Saudi Arabia was conceived as part of a wider process, and the Saudi Shi'is were regarded as members of a Shi'i transnational community bound to mobilise itself beyond the borders of the nation-states. As envisioned both by Mohammed al-Shirazi and Ruhollah Khomeyni, the very concept of the nation-state was considered illegitimate because it established false social divides between Muslims. So was the idea of a territory being the property of a family. As reflected in its name, in which no mention was made of the term 'Saudi', the Organisation for the Islamic Revolution in the Arabian Peninsula refused even to define itself as a 'Saudi' opposition movement, referring to the territory of Saudi Arabia using neutral geographic terminology, such as 'the Arabian Peninsula'. The idea of being 'Saudi' in one way or another was totally rejected, despite the fact that OIRAP's members all bore Saudi citizenship and that, despite their reference to the 'Arabian Peninsula', their political project was to liberate the territory of Saudi Arabia from the Al-Sa'ud and did not concern other parts of the geographic entity covered by the geographic denomination 'Arabian Peninsula'.

It is interesting to note that the same perspective was adopted by another Shi'i Islamic opposition group created in the course of the 1980s: the Hijazi Hezbollah (*Hezbollah al-Hijaz*). It has its origins in a group of Saudi students of Qom's seminaries who, in 1983, constituted themselves into an association named the Assembly of the Hijazi Ulama (*Tajammu' 'Ulama' al-Hijaz*) (Louër 2008: 210). Around 1987, the association was renamed the Hijazi Hezbollah and began to be involved in acts of terrorism against Saudi interests on Saudi soil and abroad (Teitelbaum 2000: 83–98). Contrary to what the use of the geographic denomination 'Hijazi' would suggest, none of the members were actually from the Hijaz, that is, the region of Mecca and Medina. Like OIRAP's activists, they were all from the Eastern Province. They chose to name themselves "Hijazi" following a usage established by Ruhollah Khomeyni himself, who used to refer to Saudi Arabia as 'the Hijaz' in order both to point to the illegitimacy of the Al-Sa'ud's rule and to the sacred nature of the territory they ruled: the land of the revelation and the location of the two holy cities of Mecca and Medina (Louër 2008: 209).

Exile generally entails a kind of acculturation of opposition movements to the political culture of the host country. It also submits them to strong constraints, due to the essentially unequal relation that develops with the host state, which all the time threatens to transform them into mere instruments in the hands of a power whose interests may come to diverge with theirs (Schain 2005: 118). This is exactly what happened to OIRAP, which was forced to revise both its ideology and its strategy radically after it came up against the resilience of the Iranian nation-state beneath the Islamic regime's global rhetoric. OIRAP first suffered from the trial of strength that developed between Ruhollah Khomeyni and Mohammed al-Shirazi. Mohammed al-Shirazi, a politicised *marja'* who was not sparing in his criticisms of several aspects of Iran's domestic and foreign policy and who, moreover, considered himself as a *marja'* whose standard perfectly matched that of Khomeyni, was typically the kind of independent politico-religious activist the Iranian regime could not afford to leave out of control. First, he was a threat to Khomeyni's effort to exert a monopoly over religious authority. Second, his transnational networks in the Arab world, and most notably in the Gulf, risked endangering the Islamic Republic's reputation among its foreign supporters. He finished his life under house arrest in Qom, where he had established himself in the aftermath of the revolution, while dozens of his partisans were jailed (Louër 2008: 186–95).

OIRAP also suffered from the revision of Iranian foreign policy under the influence of the Iranian regime's pragmatic wing. Indeed, beneath

its rhetoric of sponsoring an all-out revolution against the unjust rulers, the Islamic Republic rather rapidly resumed a foreign policy essentially guided by the will to preserve its interests as a state; at the end of the day, this hardly differed from the Shah's own policy. In this framework, it first created its own network of so-called 'liberation movements' in order to have direct control of actions undertaken in the name of the 'exportation of the revolution'. The Shiraziyyin had their own agenda, which increasingly came to contradict that of the more pragmatic circles of power in Iran. The Shirazi transnational network was definitively set aside in the framework of the final settling of scores between Iranian pragmatics and radicals that occurred in 1986 following the Iranian-Contra affair, the secret arms deal between Iran and the United States. Headed by Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, the pragmatics eliminated the radicals who had been the Shiraziyyin's main supporters.

Among the bones of contention between Iranian pragmatics and radicals was the relation with the Gulf countries, Saudi Arabia in particular. After the end of the war with Iraq (1980–1988), which bled Iran dry and left it deeply isolated within the international community, the pragmatics reached the conclusion that it was in Iran's interest to reconcile with its Gulf neighbours. The latter had played a crucial role during the war by massively financing the Iraqi war effort and pushing the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to maintain low oil prices that greatly affected Iranian financial capacity. Elected president in 1989 after Khomeyni's death, Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani was the main artisan of the rapprochement with Iran's Gulf neighbours. During the 1991 Gulf War, he offered political, logistical and material support to the Western coalition that set Kuwait free from Iraqi occupation. While Iran's relations with Saudi Arabia were the most difficult to repair, the two countries finally normalised their diplomatic relations when then Crown Prince Abdallah attended the 1997 Islamic Conference held in Tehran in person (Marschall 2003: 101–43).

### Re-Manufacturing Shiʿi Identity

For OIRAP, all these developments logically meant that it could no longer rely on Iranian state power as a strategy to achieve the revolutionary overthrow of the Saudi regime. Because of this it operated a geographic redeployment of its leadership, which left Iran for Syria, while the offices based in London and the United States gained in importance. But the failure

of the revolutionary strategy also implied the questioning of the movement's submission to its Iraqi patrons, who were the main architects of this strategy; besides, these Iraqi patrons' conflict with the Iranian regime had left them with few alternatives in terms of concrete political action. After the Gulf War, OIRAP leaders took the decision to sever ties with the Iraqi mother organisation. A new name was chosen to express the new status and aims of OIRAP: the Reform Movement (*al-Haraka al-Islahiyya*). As for the movement's mouthpiece, *The Islamic Revolution*, it was renamed *The Arabian Peninsula* (*al-Jazira al-ʿArabiyya*). One conclusion can be drawn from these two names: they made no reference either to religion or to revolution, and they signalled a focus on domestic issues. "Reform" indicated the will to participate in the debate about the reform of the Saudi State that, as I will show, developed after the Gulf War in Saudi Arabia.

Choosing the name '*Arabian Peninsula*' was more ambiguous about the movement's intention. It could indeed have signalled a will to continue to refuse the legitimacy of the Saudi regime. The organ's content, however, clearly showed that this was not what was at stake. *The Arabian Peninsula* indeed dealt mainly with the history of the Shi'is of Saudi Arabia with the aim of demonstrating their status as native inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula and, incidentally, their cultural and moral superiority over the Bedouin ethos which, they said, was pervading the Saudi State (Al-Rasheed 1998). The Sunni/Shi'i divide was reinterpreted in socio-cultural terms, as a manifestation of the classical opposition between *hadhara* (the settled and urbanised population) and *badu* (Bedouin desert dwellers).[10] The centrality of religion in the Shi'is' social identity was presented as deriving from their status as long-settled and urbanised people who, contrary to the Bedouins, favour religious belonging over tribal ties as a tool for social integration. In this vein, a specific publication entitled *The Oasis* (*al-Waha*) was created, entirely dedicated to academic-style articles about the customs of the Shi'is of the Eastern Province (marriage patterns, culinary habits, architecture, etc.).

The reinterpretation of the Sunni/Shi'i divide in the terms of the traditional *badu/hadhar* divide permitted the Reform Movement to alleviate

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[10]   One should note that this way to present Najd and the Al-Saʿud does not correspond to the complex history and social fabric of Najd. Indeed, when they made themselves the proponents of Wahhabism, the Al-Saʿud were long settled in the little locality of Darʿiyya. While they used the zeal of the Bedouin warriors in their enterprise of conquest, they were overall profoundly distrustful of the Bedouins, seen as a destabilising element in the phase of state-building (Al-Fahad: 2004).

the stigma for Shiʿis, deriving from belonging to a controversial minority Islamic current, by inserting them symbolically into a larger and moreover socially dominant status group throughout the Arabian Peninsula, that of the *hadhar*. In line with this effort to play down the religious dimension of Saudi Shiʿis' collective identity, the Reform Movement also developed a nativist and quasi-nationalist narrative about Saudi Shiʿis.[11] This perspective was particularly articulated by Hamza al-Hasan, one of the leaders of the Reform Movement based in London. In a book he published in 1993, entitled *The Shiʿa in the Arab Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, he portrayed Saudi Shiʿis as being part of a fully-fledged people: that is, a collective entity endowed not only with a specific cultural identity but also with a territory of its own. Named the Baharna (sing. Bahrani), these people are the original inhabitants (*sukkan asliyyin*) of the Arabian Gulf coast. This fact, he stressed, is asserted by numerous old Arabic sources in which "Baharna" is a denomination designating the inhabitants of "Bahrain", an entity comprising the Gulf coast between the port town of Basra in present-day Iraq to present-day Oman and of which the modern state of Bahrain is only a small part.

This way of presenting Saudi Shiʿis has a twofold consequence. On the one hand, it permits once again a reversal of the stigmas traditionally attached to Shiʿis. Indeed, as in other Gulf states, the Shiʿis in Saudi Arabia are often seen by the Sunnis as ethnic Iranians, established on the Arabian side of the Gulf in the course of the proselytising activities of Iran, where Shiism has been the state religion since 1501. Referring to the Shiʿis as belonging to the Bahrani people is a way of saying that it is the Sunnis who, in the Eastern Province, are the strangers. They came following the conquest by Abd al-Aziz and, by comparison with the Shiʿis, will always be latecomers. One cannot but notice that this nativist discourse, far from the Islamic register of legitimacy which stressed that religion was the sole legitimate social divide, once mobilised by OIRAP, is adopting one of the dominant registers of political legitimacy in the modern world. The idea that the natives are entitled to more rights than latecomers on a specific territory is indeed common ground to many contemporary conflicts.[12]

On the other hand, the narrative about the Bahrani people suggests that Saudi Shiʿis can claim the status of indigenous national minority. One can

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[11] In very much the same way as the Coptic narrative analysed by Delhaye in this volume.

[12] On this matter, see the special issue of *Critique Internationale* edited by Jean-François Bayart and Peter Geschiere 2001.

surmise that it was constructed from this perspective. It was indeed articulated by Reform Movement cadres based in the West (mainly London) at a time, the 1990s, when the United Nations Organization was being subject to intense lobbying on the part of associations self-described as representing this or that indigenous minority experiencing discrimination from the central state. As a consequence, the 1995–2004 decade was declared by the UN as the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues was created in 2002, and a Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People was adopted in 2007. In other words, it looks as if the Reform Movement re-manufactured Saudi Shi'i identity in order to make it fit with what was emerging as a legitimate international standard to formulate political demands.[13]

### From Indigenism to Patriotism

The re-manufacturing of Saudi Shi'i identity by the Reform Movement clearly signalled a will both to diversify the content of Saudi Shi'is' identity, in order to go beyond the sectarian dimension of its challenge to the Saudi regime, and to adapt to the dominant concepts framing political contestation, in order to disentangle itself from the transnational Shi'i activist networks and reach a broader international audience. This allowed the movement to reframe its demands towards the Saudi regime in terms that would not appear to be challenging its religious legitimacy, that would not result in deepening the movement's difference with the other opposition movements and, finally, that would sound familiar and acceptable to possible Western supporters.

As in 1979, it is the changes in the regional context that permitted the actualisation of the conceptual changes articulated by the Reform Movement into an empowerment strategy. Two events were decisive in this respect: the 1991 Gulf War and the 2003 regime change in Iraq. Both weakened the Saudi regime in a way that opened a window of opportunity for the Shi'i opposition. In 1991, the kingdom's call on US troops to protect it from a possible Iraqi invasion of at least part of its oilfield projected an image of the Saudi regime as a militarily weak power obliged to rely on non-Muslim protectors. While the liberals took the opportunity to come back with demands pertaining to the establishment of a popular participation

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[13] This point is also underlined by Picard in this volume.

mechanism, the most serious criticism, from the regime's point of view, came from the ranks of the Sunni scholars educated in its generously-financed Islamic universities. In two petitions presented in the aftermath of the war, the Letter of Demand and the Memorandum of Advice, they publicly criticised the regime's lack of commitment to Islamic principles and suggested a whole set of reforms in order to restore Islamic values to the kingdom's core policies (Dekmejian 1994, Okruhlik 2002).

It is noticeable that none of the Letter's signatories were from the Shi'i opposition, despite the fact that they probably agreed with many of the demands formulated by the petitioners, which touched upon a wide range of issues such as the redistribution of wealth, the implementation of justice and equality, and the appointment of qualified people for state office. Put simply, the Shi'i opposition could not but be wary of petitions, the declared aim of which was to restore Islamic principles: that is, actually to reaffirm a Sunni orthodox way of interpreting Islam in which the Shi'is would be given no legitimate place. As a matter of fact, they were not asked to join, an indication that the core of the new opposition did not consider them as potential partners. However, the upsurge of criticism from among the ranks of those who most benefited from the regime's largesse, and who used to embody the regime's Islamic legitimacy at home and abroad, totally transformed the regime's perception of its Shi'i opposition. In the context of the improvement in relations with Iran and the related abandonment of a revolutionary perspective by the Reform Movement, the Shi'is appeared much less threatening than they used to be, especially in face of the emerging Sunni Islamic dissent. Reconciling with them then appeared an easy way to gain, if not the support of the strategically-located Shi'i population, at least an appeasement of relations. As a result, while the regime undertook to crack down on the Sunni opposition, it finally concluded an agreement with the Reform Movement in 1993. Most of the movement's leaders were authorised to move back to Saudi territory in exchange for a promise not to pursue opposition activities (Ibrahim 2006: 190–191).

The 2003 deposition of Saddam Husein marked a second turning point in the evolution of the Shi'i opposition. The invasion of Iraq was made in the context of serious strain in Saudi-American relations after the 11 September 2001 attacks in New York by a group of mainly Saudi militants from al-Qa'ida. The Americans suspected the Saudi-sponsored Sunni ultra-orthodoxy of being responsible for the diffusion of hatred, violence and tyranny in the Middle East. On the eve of the invasion, the Shi'is, who constituted almost 60 per cent of Iraq's population and were expected to be the future rulers of Iraq, were increasingly presented as an oppressed

population, the first victims of a religious intolerance rooted in the Sunni interpretation of Islam embodied by Saudi Arabia. Rumours spread about an American-Shi'i alliance to reshape the Middle East, including the possibility of a partition of Saudi Arabia, leading to the constitution of a new state under American protectorate composed of the oil-rich Eastern Province and the current state of Bahrain. This would actually be no less than the reconstitution of a state for the Bahrani people as rediscovered by the Reform Movement, and whose customs it had described at length in its publications.

The 2003 regime change in Iraq hence fostered a radical change of image for the Shi'is both at the international and the Saudi domestic level. From radical revolutionaries subservient to Iran, they were now seen as the victims of Sunni intolerance and allies of the United States. For the Reform Movement, it was a golden opportunity to reassert itself and come back with the old and unanswered demands of equal treatment for the Shi'is. The 1993 accord had indeed not fundamentally changed things in this respect: the Reform Movement's subversive potential has been neutralised, but the overall situation of the Shi'is had not improved, making the movement's leaders increasingly the target of criticism within the community (Ibrahim 2006: 211–212). As in 1991, the opposition of various ideological backgrounds took the opportunity of the strain put on the Saudi regime to present the rulers with a petition, the 'Vision for the Present and Future of the Country'. For the first time, Shi'is were invited to sign. A few weeks later, however, in the direct aftermath of the regime change in Iraq in April 2003, Hasan al-Saffar took the initiative to present Prince Abdallah[14] with a petition specifically dealing with Shi'i issues entitled 'Partners of the Nation' (*Shuraka fi al-Watan*). The 450 signatories, all Shi'is coming from various social, political and geographic backgrounds, affirmed their full allegiance to the Al-Sa'ud and their commitment to their nation, demanding in exchange that Shi'ism be recognised as a full-fledged and legitimate Islamic school of thought (*madhhab*), implying that they would have the right to practice their creed freely. The petitioners were received by Prince Abdallah who, a few weeks later, launched the first of a series of National Dialogue Conferences meant to establish dialogue between the various components of the Saudi nation and propose reforms helping to improve overall social relations in the kingdom. The first conference was dedicated

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[14] Prince Abdallah was then the kingdom's regent following the stroke that incapacitated King Fahd in 1995.

to an unprecedented dialogue between representatives of the various religious components of the kingdom: Shi'is, Sufis, and representatives of the non-Wahhabi Sunni schools of thought sat together with prominent figures of the Wahhabi religious establishment as well as personalities from the Sunni Islamic opposition (Louër 2008: 247).

The petition and the conference have had the effect of positioning Hasan al-Saffar and other leaders of the Reform Movement as actors in the debate about reform, which was launched after the 11th of September attacks. Their contribution to this debate is twofold. On the one hand, they clearly promote liberal-inspired reforms based on the idea that the state should promote pluralism as well as freedom of thought and speech. This liberal-oriented programme was articulated by Hasan al-Saffar as early as 1990 in his *Pluralism and Freedom in Islam* (*al-Taʿadudiyya wa l-Hurriyya fi al-Islam*). Some of his close associates have gone a step further by writing that the best way to implement such a programme would be to establish a 'civil state' (*dawla madaniyya*) blind to the religious convictions of its citizens (Mahfuz 2004). On the other hand, the Reform Movement is clearly engaged in typical identity politics, demanding that the specific grievances of the Shi'is be addressed and, overall, that the Shi'is be recognised as a community with the right to express its religious difference. It is significant that it is mainly on that ground that the demands of Hasan al-Saffar have been partly addressed. The Shi'is have not been granted full recognition as a religious community, but they have obtained more room for manœuvre in terms of religious freedom. The almost systematic hindrance to the construction of Shi'i mosques, for example, has been cancelled in the Eastern Province. The Shi'i judiciary system has been completely reshuffled (in 2005), which permitted a significant increase in the number of Shi'i judges—from two to seven—as well the allocation of more financial and infrastructural means.

In exchange for this relative religious recognition, and in the hope of getting more, Hasan al-Saffar has effectively engaged in what many deem an excessive pledge of allegiance to the Saudi regime. Every time the Shi'is' loyalty to the rulers risks being put into question, mostly following international and/or regional events, he writes communiqués explaining that the Shi'is are loyal Saudi citizens and that foreign powers hoping to instrumentalise them in their influence strategies would be confronted with the depth of their patriotic feelings. In 2004, following the release of the US State Department report on religious freedom in Saudi Arabia, which denounced the mistreatment of the Shi'is by the Saudi regime, he criticised the American intrusion into Saudi domestic affairs. In November 2009,

Saudi Arabia decided to undertake a military strike against the Houthist movement in Yemen, seen as supported by Iran because it fights in the name of the scorned rights of the Zaydis, a religious minority related to Shi'ism. In open rebellion against the Yemeni regime, the movement has its bases in regions bordering Saudi Arabia and had made several incursions into Saudi territory. A few days after the Saudi military operations began, Hasan al-Saffar released a communiqué supporting the right of the Saudi State to protect itself.[15]

### Shi'is, Reform and Royal Factionalism

We can now return to the initial question of why there is a discrepancy between daily social intercourse, in which Shi'is tend to avoid displaying their religious identity, and the public debate level where, on the contrary, Shi'is overtly take part as Shi'is. There is no doubt whatsoever that the unprecedented position gained by Hasan al-Saffar and his followers in public debate in post-9/11 Saudi Arabia does not result from a genuine reform of the Saudi regime, susceptible to generate overall societal effects. Rather it results from a variation in the traditional competition between various centres of power within the Saudi royal family, of which the language about reform is only one attribute.

In Saudi Arabia, the king was never an absolute monarch but a *primus inter pares*, who has constantly to take into account the views of the most powerful members of the royal family. He can only rule by drawing on a coalition of princes, who have either administrative, regional, military, or media fiefdoms and, sometimes, also international supporters (Mouline 2010). During the reign of King Faysal (1964–75), a strong and close-knit faction emerged called the 'Sudayris', composed of the seven sons of King Abd al-Aziz and Hassa bint Ahmad al-Sudayri. Their aim was to secure power for their leader, and this was achieved with the accession of Fahd to the throne in 1982. But the other royal factions endeavoured to balance the Sudayris' domination and succeeded in imposing Abdallah as Fahd's crown prince.

After Fahd suffered a stroke that incapacitated him in 1995, Abdallah became the *de facto* regent and undertook to consolidate his position so as to weaken the Sudayris. His enthronement in 2005, after Fahd's death,

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[15] For the English version of the communiqué, see www.saudishia.com/?act=artc&id =152.

fostered the competition, with Abdallah struggling to enlarge his sphere of influence in the face of the still strong Sudayri faction. In the competition, and under the special international circumstances described above, the various princes engaged in a campaign to gain supporters outside of the royal family, both at the international and the domestic levels. King Abdallah worked to build an image of himself as a reformer that departed from his previous reputation of being among the most conservative and religiously-minded of the great princes. In Saudi Arabia, he showed benevolence toward liberals, reformers, technocrats and entrepreneurs (Al-Rasheed 2008: 15). He also endeavoured to appear as a king close to his subjects from all regional, tribal and religious backgrounds, touring the country in order to meet the citizens, and assure them that they were all equally cherished. The evolution of the Shi'is' position must also be seen in this perspective: in the international context described above, Abdallah constructed them as one of his constituencies in the factional struggle against the Sudayris. The consequence is twofold. On the one hand, as long as Abdallah succeeds in containing the Sudayris, the Shi'is will benefit from the king's protection and potentially gain more room for manœuvre. On the other hand, if the Sudayris win, the Shi'is will be seen as the allies of the vanquished faction and somehow punished. This is exactly what happened in March 2009. Emboldened by the king's benevolent attitude, a group of young Shi'is decided to visit the tombs of the Imams at Medina's Baqi' cemetery and perform the traditional Shi'i rituals there. They were beaten by the religious police who took them into custody. The king tried to intervene to set them free, but their release was opposed by Prince Nayef, the powerful interior minister, who also happens to be the chief of the Sudayris. The pilgrims were only released a few days afterwards, when Nayef decided to do so, in a sovereign act aimed at showing the king the limits of his power.[16] A few days later, Nayef was appointed vice prime minister, a position that, according to an established tradition, makes him *de facto* the next crown prince[17] and, hence, king.

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[16] On the Baqi' events, see Mathiessen 2009. I am indebted to Nabile Mouline who made me realise how these events were directly related to the struggle between the king and the Sudayris.

[17] Sultan, the current crown prince and defence minister, is very ill and expected to die soon.

## Conclusion

The political attitude of Saudi Shi'is has shifted radically from the time of the conquest of Qatif and Hasa by the Al-Sa'ud in 1913 to the present day. Like many other minorities in the Middle East, they have chosen 'voice' over 'exit' and silence, but not over 'loyalty'. This is probably what makes the specificity of the Saudi Shi'i case as compared with others: they have raised their voices in order to affirm their difference, but at the same time their most visible leaders, namely Hasan al-Saffar and his aids, have chosen to pledge allegiance to the regime. This is despite the fact that, when the Reform Movement engaged in the re-manufacturing of Saudi Shi'i identity in cultural and nativist terms, it gave the Shi'is all the symbolic material necessary to frame their demands in nationalist language. This confirms what Picard notes in her chapter for this volume: that religious minorities in the Middle East have seldom made territorial claims and have instead looked for ways to have a better share in the existing state structures.[18] This is also why I have chosen to describe their empowerment strategy with concepts such as 'nativism' and 'identity politics', in contrast with 'nationalism': political sovereignty is not the issue for the cadres of the Reform Movement, who have renounced any strategy that would appear to challenge the integrity of the regime in one way or another.

Another point is worth underlining as a conclusion: the central role played by the transnational networks and, overall, the international context in most of the political shifts experienced by Saudi Shi'is. First, the transnational clerical networks linking the Saudi Shi'i notability to the great religious centres of Iraq were a key in the birth of Shi'i identity politics. Second, the Islamic Republic of Iran, which positioned itself as the sponsor of oppressed Shi'i minorities all over the Middle East, played a leading role in orienting the Message Movement strategy towards revolution rather than negotiation with the Saudi regime, and, after the Iranian pragmatics defeated the radicals in the late 1980s and 1990s, in the abandonment of revolution altogether. Third, the Reform Movement took great care to frame its language and demands in terms congruent with international standards for promoting minority rights. The resort to the international level in various ways is a striking feature of many other cases broached in this volume.

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[18] See also the work of Reidar Visser on the quasi-inexistence of Shi'i secessionism in southern Iraq (Visser 2005).

This should prompt us to depart for good from analytical approaches that consider minorities as enclosed within national boundaries. Such minorities are probably the exception rather than the rule.

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## NATIONALISM AND CONFESSIONALISM:
## SHIʿIS, DRUZES AND ALAWIS IN SYRIA AND LEBANON

Kais M. Firro

### *Introduction*

Comprising more than twenty religious and ethnic groups, the modern states of Syria and Lebanon face the overriding problem of regulating confessional and ethnic conflicts.[1] The Syrian and Lebanese ruling elites have strongly emphasized the importance of 'national unity' against internal and external threats. Despite the call for unity, an implicit and explicit confessional competition has endured, inducing the leaders of most of the religious communities to jockey for securing slices of power.

Although the question of power and powerlessness in Syria and Lebanon is related to economic, social, constitutional and cultural aspects, the present chapter investigates this question through the prism of the nationalist discourse adopted by intellectuals and politicians of the Shiʿis, Druzes and Alawis. The article focuses on this discourse during the period of the Arab *Nahda* (the Arab awakening) at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, and its implication on ethno-politics within the two states.

Perhaps the distinction drawn by some scholars between the 'Jacobinistic' and 'syncretistic' types of state nationalism would provide clues for understanding the ways in which the ruling elites in Syria and Lebanon have regulated the confessional cleavages (Hanf 1993: 28–37). Jacobinism and syncretism have become two models of nationalism for Syria and Lebanon since their independence in 1940s. However, Syrian Jacobinism and Lebanese syncretism have their origin in the late Ottoman period and before the creation of the two States in the 1920s. From 1908 to 1920, the Arab nationalist discourse advocated an integration of the religious

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[1] The terms "confessional" and "confessionalism" are used here as translation of the Arabic terms *taʾifi* and *taʾifiyya* that refer to collective identities rather than to religious doctrines and tenets (*madhhab*).

communities in one and indivisible nation, not only in social and political domains but also in the cultural one, rather similar to the Jacobinistic type of nation and nationalism based on the principle of equality. In the same period, Maronite intellectuals and politicians developed their own nationalist discourse that called for the creation of a separate Lebanese nation that recognizes confessional diversity.

Since 1946, the successive regimes in Syria have adopted the Jacobinistic type of nationalism. In 1960s, this nationalism helped military officers from the Alawi, Druze and Isma'ili minority groups to assume control of the state institutions, paving the road for Hafiz al-Asad, the powerful Alawi officer, to takeover in 1970. To avoid the image of a minority regime and the symbolic deprivation of the Sunni majority, and in the hope of minimizing the latter's opposition, Hafiz al-Asad's regime strongly emphasized the Jacobinistic ideology and the discourse of secular Arab nationalism. However, in Syria, Jacobinism increasingly degenerated into an illusion of equality, because politics in the multi-communal states are about power and wealth rather than about suitable ideologies.

With the ideology and discourse of Lebanese nationalism which emerged before the 1920s, modern Lebanon adopted syncretistic nationalism, setting out the principle of proportional representation of the religious communities as a basis for power sharing in the State. The supporters of this syncretistic nationalism believed that an independent Lebanon could unite the various discrete religious sects into one single nation. However, Lebanese syncretistic nationalism, instead of creating unity, has perpetuated the country's diversity and deepened the confessional rivalries.

The civil wars in 1958 and 1975–1990 introduced a growing convergence of interests among Lebanese politicians, historians, and political scientists: the subject of their concerns was the political system in Lebanon. The supporters of the system claim that the confessions or *tawa'if* (sing. *ta'ifa*) in Lebanon are the natural units of history and integral elements of the human experience that have entailed the formation of a political system based on confessional representation in the State's institutions. Prior to the Ta'if Agreement signed in 1989, most of the political elites and intellectuals who supported the system belonged to the Christian communities. They depicted the Lebanese political system as 'democracy of proportional representation' or 'democracy of consensus' (Harik 1972: 65–66). Even in the face of the breakdown of the Lebanese State as a result of the civil war from 1975 to 1990, they retained their convictions, arguing that the war was an outcome of external interventions and that the confessional system would function again if the Lebanese could succeed in rebuilding a strong

state that makes it more "compatible with the heterogeneous makeup of society" (el-Khazen 2000: 9–11, 396–397).

## Shiʿis Between Nationalism and Confessionalism

At the end of the nineteenth century, the nationalist germ began to spread among Shi'is, Druzes and Alawis. Writing about the Shi'is at the end of the Ottoman era and the beginning of the Mandate period, Waddah Sharara depicts his community as a perplexed community (*umma qaliqa*). Sharara analyzes the social, political, and cultural changes in the southern part of modern Lebanon, pointing out that, historically, the Shi'is were known under two designations. They were called *Matawila*, a word derived from the root-noun *wilaya*, which means to be loyal to Ali, son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad. The designation *matawila* links them to the broader religious Shi'i identity that Sharara calls *al-tashayuʿ* (Shi'ism). The Shi'is were also known as *al-Amiliyya* or *al-Amiliyun*, based on their claim of ancestral descent from *Amila*, a Yemenite tribe that had immigrated into the area before the rise of Islam. The emergence of the Arab nationalist discourse induced Shi'i intellectuals to seek theoretical ways to integrate their community within the 'nascent nation' without losing their traditional *tashayuʿ* and their tribal identity as components of their collective identity. The different designations of the Shi'is are at the origin of the community's perplexity regarding its self-perception (Sharara 1996: 61–67).

Throughout their history, the Shi'is had used the principle of *taqiyya*,[2] shielding their religious belief while manifesting loyalty toward the ruling Sunni majority. But the rise of Arab nationalism at the end of the nineteenth century prompted a new outlook within the growing circle of Shi'i intellectuals. They searched for a new blueprint by which they could adapt themselves to the new nationalist ideas. Such adaptation led to what one could describe as a redefinition of the 'we-group' identity. In this process of redefinition, the intellectuals played a decisive role. They laid emphasis on different affiliations in accordance with different situations. The redefinition of the we-group identity led to a phenomenon known as *polytaxis* (*poly* many, *taxis* order) or the *polytactic* potential. As Georg Elwert illuminates: "Groups and individuals may belong to different reference groups simultaneously. According to the opportunity of situations,

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[2] *Taqiyya* is usually translated into English as dissimulation. In Arabic, it means prudence and carefulness.

they may stress one or other of these affiliations as their 'real' one ... We may call this phenomenon *polytaxis* ... or the *polytactic potential*" (Elwert 1997: 71–72).

Since *al-nahda*, Shi'i, Alawi and the Druze intellectuals and politicians had used their polytactic potential in their search for new ways to adapt to the era of nationalism. One might argue that the polytactic potential used by these heterodox communities is nothing but another form of *taqiyya* under new circumstances. It is beyond the scope of this article to delineate all the complex aspects of the practice of *taqiyya* among the Shi'is, Alawis, and Druzes throughout their histories. In general, the practice of *taqiyya* is a conscious act through which Shi'is, Alawis, and Druzes pretend to accept the faith and rituals of the Sunni dominant religion while remaining deeply attached to their own religious uniqueness. The ultimate aim of *taqiyya* has always been to maintain religious independence and avoid being assimilated through external religious dictates and persecutions. Unlike *taqiyya*, the polytactic potential is not an act of pretending, but a genuine attitude, through which intellectuals of these communities attempt to accommodate their collective identity to the wider social, cultural, ideological, and political frameworks. The polytactic potential is not unique for the Islamic heterodox communities, but a universal phenomenon characteristic for all minorities trying to find their place in a society with dominant majority.

Until the end of the nineteenth century, religious leaders were the sole stratum to codify and transmit the practice of *taqiyya* among the members of these heterodox communities. In pre-modern societies, when formal education was deficient, religious leaders assumed a pivotal role in ensuring the perpetuation of religious lore and practice that provided the axis of religious identity for successive generations. The socio-economic changes and the expansion of educational systems required a new breed of intelligentsia and leadership that can determine the framework of the relationship between their communities and the 'others'. Although religious leaders retained a hold over the affection of the illiterate lower strata, the expansion of education had put a premium on the activities of intellectuals who began to replace *taqiyya* by a new strategy of polytactic potential seen as more appropriate in the new era of nationalism. They realized that their religious communities were no longer isolated in their mountainous areas where the practice of *taqiyya* had helped them to survive and maintain their religious identities for centuries.

Because they have misconstrued *taqiyya*, many researchers still go on using the concept as a passe-partout to explain the political behavior of the Islamic heterodox communities in the past and present. To use *taqiyya* alone to account for the behavioral patterns of these communities in modern

politics would amount to an anachronistic explanation, where the past explains the present and vice versa.

The journal *al-Irfan*—established in 1909 by Ahmad Arif al-Zayn—is a good example of the polytactic potential used by the Shi'is in an era of nationalism. Its writers looked for ways to reconcile their confessional and national identities (see Khalidi 1981: 118–123). An article published in the second issue of *al-Irfan* by Musawbi, a pen name, under the title "Law and History" exemplifies attempts to reconcile Shi'i identity and nationalism. The author of the article deals with the relationship between *milla* (religious community) and *umma* (nation). Assuming that history retains memories and records of both, the author differentiates between 'natural civic law' and religious law. The former is dynamic and adaptable, in accordance with changes that occur within the nation, while the latter is stable and based on religious texts. This differentiation led the author to distinguish between two kinds of identity: the one attached to the *milla* and the other attached to the *umma*. The law of the *milla* refers to the personal status of marriage and inheritance, while that of the *umma* refers to the general status of the polity. The author sees the nation as a superior political entity, containing several sub-entities, in this case religious communities (*al-Irfan*, vol. 1, March 1909: 60–68; Sharara 1996: 29–31).

One year later, Ahmad Rida, one of the prominent Shi'i intellectuals, wrote an article entitled "What is a Nation?" in *al-Irfan*. In this article, Rida seeks to define the identity of his religious community in relation to three different collectives: the Muslim [religious] *umma*, the Ottoman [civic] *umma* and the Arab [national] *umma* (*al-Irfan*, vol. 2 no. 9, November 1910: 459–462; Sharara 1996: 40). In attributing to the Shi'is more than one component of identity, Rida provides Shi'i intellectuals with the fundamental arguments concerning their collective identity. These became the basic tenets used by many Shi'i intellectuals who published their ideas in *al-Irfan*.

Dealing simultaneously with different references of collective identities, *al-Irfan* reflects the polytactic potential of its writers and the ability of its Shi'i readers to redefine their collective identity in accordance with the occasion. In addition to articles on nationalism and localism, an editorial article, in 1913, assigns another goal to the organ: "It specially focuses on Shi'i affairs, both old and contemporary" (*al-Irfan*, vol. 5, no. 21, November 1913: 1, quoted in Sharara 1996: 12).

In December 1920 when he resumed the publication of his journal after the First World War, al-Zayn bewailed the division of "the unfortunate homeland" into several entities including Greater Lebanon. It was clear that he alluded to the colonial division of the Levant, where the Arab nationalists

had aspired to establish their nation-state (*al-Irfan*, vol. 6, no. 1–2, 1–3; Sharara 1996: 183). However, apart from the nationalist intellectuals, the majority of the Shi'i leaders and religious scholars could not adopt a stable political stance vis-à-vis the French occupation and the territorial division of Syria and Lebanon until 1920 (Shu'ayb 1987: 87–91; Bazzi 1993: 50–104).

During the Mandate, the main clan chiefs not only went along with the confessional system of Greater Lebanon but contributed to its crystalliza-tion (Shu'ayb 1987: 72–104). However, to justify their integration and to satisfy the Shi'i demands for equality within Greater Lebanon, the powerful leaders of these clans had now to change the outlooks of both elites and peasantry by emphasizing the interests of their community and formulating their protests against the discrimination of the Shi'is in Lebanon. Although the intellectuals were attached to Arab nationalism and were opposed to the mandatory regime, they also had to accommodate their nationalist discourse to include the Shi'i grievances. In order to compete with the discourse of the confessional leaders, the intellectuals of *al-Irfan* began to link local grievances with the Arab nationalist demands for unity between Syria and Lebanon (Shu'ayb 1987: 93; *al-Irfan*, vol. 16, no. 2, September 1928: 122–124). The Arab nationalist discourse of *al-Irfan* endowed the Shi'i literati with a new consciousness that the French authorities in Lebanon attempted to preclude through great efforts at separating Shi'i affairs from those of the Sunnis (Rondot 1947: vol. 1. 66). In the 1930s, a new generation of Shi'i Arab nationalists emerged. Their opposition to the French Mandate was stronger than that of the first generation, and they spoke the same political language as the Sunni nationalists. Meanwhile, they combined their confessional demands for civic equality in the Lebanese state with their nationalist discourse (Shu'ayb 1987: 119–120).

By presenting the Shi'i grievances and demands for equality in Lebanon, both the nationalist and confessionalist Shi'is coined the term *matlabiyya* (a word derived from the root-noun *matlab*, a demand). Since the Man-date, matlabiyya has become the core of the political discourse of the Shi'i intellectuals and political leaders, being embraced by both nationalists and confessionalists. In this sense, matlabiyya presents another example of the polytactic potential of the intellectuals and political leaders to adapt to the era of nationalism and nation-state. Although the approval of the Franco-Lebanese Treaty of 1936[3] resulted in muting the demands for Syrian unity

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[3]  The Franco-Lebanese Treaty of Friendship and Alliance of 1936 redefined the relation-ship between the French Mandate and the state of Lebanon. According to this Treaty, the

among the Muslim leaders, including the Shi'is (Shu'ayb 1987: 162–163), the matlabiyya confessional discourse, since this treaty until today, has become an important component in Shi'i collective identity. Shi'i confessional leaders and nationalist intellectuals have relied on matlabiyya to propagate their respective ideas among their coreligionists.

Following the first and second generations of intellectuals, the modern Shi'is would stress one component of their identity and omit another in accordance with different situations. Since the independence of Lebanon, one can discern several components of this collective identity: local communalism with its matlabiyya character, Shi'ism, Lebanese patriotism (*watani-yya*), Arab nationalism (*qawmiyya*), and Islamism. These components have been internalized and have come to characterize the polytactic potential of Shi'i collective identity. Leaders of the active confessional organizations of the Amal and the Hizbollah movements continue to address their Shi'i interlocutors with discourses similar to those of the first generation intellectuals. Thus, polytactic potential has become an inherent component of their identity, enabling Lebanese Shi'is to play a leading role in Arab and Lebanese politics.

Although since 1980 the Shi'is have constituted more than 30 percent of the total population of Lebanon (Johnson 2001: 3), they still behave as a minority. Neither their demographic size nor their political power can bring about a radical change in the confessional political system of the country. The 1975–1990 civil war and the recent clashes between Shi'is and Sunnis in 2008 testify to the impossibility of introducing radical changes in a political system based on 'virtual' demography. Their main political organizations, Amal and Hizbollah, abstained from changing the existing political system that hinges on confessional distribution of the political power and, in the absence of a new census since 1932, on 'virtual' demography. Because Christian and Muslim elites could not agree to conduct a new census, the ratio of 6:5 decided upon in 1943 continued to be the basis for distributing the parliamentary seats until the Ta'if Agreement that changed this ratio to 5:5.

The emergence of Amal in 1976 and Hizbollah in 1982–3 was a result of socio-economic and political processes that have eroded the traditional and obsolete Shi'i elites. These processes began in the 1950s and became

French government obliges itself to defend the integrity of the Lebanese territory. The Treaty of 1936 appends two annexes that guarantee equality of all citizens and ensures an equitable representation of the different religious communities in the state institutions.

stronger in the 1960s and 1970s through the activities of Musa al-Sadr (1928–1978), who became the paramount leader of the community in the 1960s. His first significant acts were to establish a series of vocational institutes. In 1967, al-Sadr promoted a parliamentary legislation to establish, two years later, the Supreme Islamic Shi'i Council as an independent body from the Supreme Islamic Council of the Sunnis. In 1974, he founded *Harakat al-Mahrumin* (the Movement of the Deprived) that exhorted Shi'is not to accept their deprivation fatalistically. The growing influence of al-Sadr prior to the Lebanese Civil War of 1975 gave direction to the political awakening of the Shi'is, embodied by the rise of Amal. In the early 1980s, a coterie of radical clerics among Amal's supporters disapproved of what they saw as the Amal leaders' tactic of seeking a *modus vivendi* with the 'corrupt' political system of Lebanon and even with the Israeli occupation. With the assistance of Iran in 1982, this coterie made up the cadre of Hizbollah (God's party). Hizballah's fierce ideological tenor and commitment to confront Israel's occupation in the south attracted many Shi'is. By eroding Amal's influence among the Shi'is, at the end of the 1980s Hizbollah became one of the leading parties of the country. Although it has served—at least until 1989—as a stalking horse for Iranian interests, Hizbollah has proved responsive to the Shi'i aspirations of their domestic constituency (Norton 2007: 13–46).

The rise of Hassan Nasrallah as the secretary-general of the party in 1992 inaugurated two parallel and interrelated changes in Hizbollah's political stance. The party decided to abandon its previous denunciation of the 'corrupt' confessional system and take part in the elections of 1992. By battling the economic 'exploitation' of the Shi'is and by retaining a fierce confrontation of the Israeli occupation in south Lebanon, Hizbollah succeeded in broadening a mass political mobilization among the Shi'is. Although attached to its religious convictions, Hizbollah adopted a strategy which does not dwell only on religious themes, but opens the doors for non-religious Shi'i middleclass to take part in its politics. Thus many Shi'is who did not yearn to accept its religious and ideological passions have embraced its radical appeal, converting it to a Janus-faced organization (Norton 2007: 45–46, 98–103).

The strategy adopted since 1992 is reflected in Nasrallah's and other leaders' speeches, which merge a religious discourse with a mundane one. A good example is their speeches in the 'Ashura commemorations which have been converted by Hizbollah into opportunities for mass political mobilization. The 'Ashura (derived from the Arabic word for tenth) commemorates the mourning of the martyrdom of the grandson of the Prophet,

Husayn Ibn Ali, killed and mutilated by the Sunni ruler of Iraq in the tenth day of Muharram in the year 61 of the Muslim calendar (10 October 680 CE). In pre-modern time, Shi'is used to avoid publicly commemorating the 'Ashura. But, in 1938 when nationalism and Islamic reformism removed their sense of prudence, Shi'is abandoned *taqiyya*, inaugurating the modern public commemoration of 'Ashura, which since the 1960s has become a symbol of their religious and political awakening, and a manifestation of power in Lebanon (Norton 2007: 51–68).

We find a striking illustration of this change in the televised speeches which have two parts, religious and political, made by Nasrallah during the Ashura commemorations. In the religious part, he emphasizes the 'uniqueness' of the Shi'is as equal partners with the Sunnis in the Islamic *umma*; in a speech on Shi'i religious values, Nasrallah openly refers to several specific religious ceremonies and tenets without shielding them behind the old *taqiyya*. The political part of Nasrallah's speeches recalls the polytactic potential adopted by the Shi'is since *al-Nahda* when he routinely castigates the 'enemies' of the Arab and Muslim *umma*s, stressing the loyalty of his community to Arab nationalism and Lebanese patriotism.[4] The recent 'Document of Hizbolla' dated 30 November 2009 is a cogent exposition of the polytactic potential strategy through which Hizballah pragmatically confronts the shifting political landscape of regional politics in the Middle East, as well as the changing terrain of Lebanese politics after 2005. Although it stresses the necessity of abolishing the Lebanese confessional system in order to achieve a 'just democracy' in Lebanon, the document avers:

> Until the time the Lebanese, through their national dialogue, reach the historical and sensitive goal, i.e. the abolition of political confessionalism, the democracy of consensus will remain the basis of governance in Lebanon, because it is the real embodiment of the Constitution and the Pact of the coexistence (Document of Hizbolla, 30 November 2009).

While dealing with the role of Hizbollah in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its relationship with the Arab countries and the Iranian Revolution, this document reiterates three pillars which still hold Shi'i identity and self-perception, i.e. Lebanese patriotism, Arab nationalism, and Islamism (Hizbolla Document: Website of *Muntada Rabitat al-Tullab al-Muslimin fi Lubnan*).

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[4] Hassan Nasralla's speeches are available in many internet sites under the Arabic title: *Khitabat al-Sayd Hasan Nasralla.*

## *The Druze Response to the Nationalist Message*

The Druze religious faith is an offshoot of the Shi'i-Isma'ili doctrine developed during the tenth century, when the Isma'ilis established the Fatimid State in Tunisia and subsequently conquered Egypt in 969. The Fatimid rulers called themselves *khalifa*s and soon claimed to be *imam*s. The Isma'ili *da'wa* (religious mission) endowed the Fatimid's rulers, the *khalifa*s-*imam*s, with heavenly powers, and introduced the notion that they are messianic candidates. During the reign of al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (996–1021), the *imam-khalifa* of the Fatimid dynasty, a group of scholars, eager to see the messianic promise fulfilled, began from 1017 to propagate their own *da'wa*, which they themselves called *da'wat al-tawhid* (mission of Unitarianism), and which outsiders called al-Durziyya (Druzism). They claimed that al-Hakim was of divine nature. It is at this rupture point that tradition locates the origin of the Druze religious sect. Druzism claimed that *lahut* (Divinity) had manifested itself in al-Hakim under human form (*nasut*), because human beings cannot escape their physical nature and their comprehension is bound by space and time. God can be understood only within the limits of human comprehension by *nasut*. The *nasut* is not *tajasud* (an incarnation) of God, but an image through which He brings Himself closer to human understanding (Firro 1992: 7–12). The Druze Canon puts a strong emphasis on the Unitarian concept, warning against taking the *nasut* image for the Deity itself because "God is unique, eternal, without a beginning, and abiding without end. He is beyond the comprehension of human understanding and cannot be defined by words or attributes distinct from His essence. He has no body or spirit" (Epistle 13, *Druze Canon*).

According to the Druze faith, God created all human souls and bodies at once, their number is fixed for all times. A soul cannot exist outside a human body, which serves as the vestment (*qamis*) of the soul. Through transmigration of their souls, the 'true believers' accepted the Unitarian *da'wa*, and they will be able to free themselves from their shortcomings and reach a 'state of completion' (*al-kamal al-akhir*). Because the 'true believers' apply their hearts and minds in deep devotion to God, they are exempt from the performance of the Islamic *da'a'im* (pillars). Instead, the Druze faith substituted seven Unitarian principles (Firro 1992: 13).

The influence of Islamic *sufi*sm comes to the fore in the many *sufi* principles to which the Druze sheikhs adhere in their overall *maslak* (behavior). These sheikhs form the *uqqal* (the initiated or wise men and women), who have full access to the Druze Canon. The others, the *juhhal* (uninitiated or ignorant) have no permission to access the Druze Canon, receiving only

oral religious instruction until they decide to join the initiated group. Keeping faith in secrecy led the members of the community to practice the Shiʿi principle of *taqiyya*. However, *taqiyya* could not convince many Sunni scholars that they were faithful Muslims. Therefore, many of these scholars follow Ibn Taymiyya's *fatwa* from the beginning of the fourteenth century that declared the Druzes and the Alawis as heretics outside Islam (Ibn Taymiyya 1998: vol. 18, 98–99).

At the end of the nineteenth century, the Druze intellectuals from Mt. Lebanon embraced the Arab nationalist discourse. Shakib Arsalan (1869–1946) was among the first who attempted to articulate the fundamental arguments in order to integrate the community within the Muslim and Arab *umma*. His mother was a Muslin Sunni who probably had a strong influence upon her son's ideas. Until the end of the Ottoman period, Arslan kept up his contacts with many scholars among the Islamic reformers and Arab nationalists. It was within this cultural context that Shakib Arslan elaborated his Islamic and Arabist discourse and ideology (al-Mawla 1990: 28–30, 53–54).

The study of his extensive writings and his political activities show that his Pan-Islamic and Arab nationalist notions were genuine and not a manifestation of *taqiyya*. Until his death in 1946, Arslan had preached a blend of Islamic reformism and Arab nationalism that had a strong appeal for many Sunni and Shiʿi Muslims, and even for most of the Druze literati in Mt. Lebanon. The Druze revolt of 1925 in Mt. Hawran against the Mandate and its connection with the Syrian Arab nationalists, prompted Arslan to reiterate his previous arguments regarding the Druzes' Arab identity. He focused exclusively on the Druze racial origin and on the Islamic characteristics of the Druze community. While Arslan emphasizes the pure Arab origin of the Druzes, he claims that Druzism is a branch of Islam, notably Shiʿi-Ismaʿilism. When dealing with the Druze faith, it was enough for Arslan to point out that the principles of the Druze doctrine are similar to those of many *sufi* Muslims. Like the *sufi*s, the Druzes' esoteric interpretation of the Qur'an led them to call for 'the unity of the cosmos'. Probably in an effort to make his arguments appear more convincing, he deliberately avoids dealing with the Druze doctrine's abolition of the pillars of Islam. Without referring directly to the Muslim pillars, Arslan claims that the Druzes fulfill all the Islamic duties (al-Mawla 1990: 75–77).

At the end of the nineteenth century, other Druze intellectuals emerged to adopt ideas similar to those of Arslan. Among these was Ali Ibn Yusuf Ibn Nasir al-Din, who directed the school of al-Dauudiya for ten years; the school was established in Mt. Lebanon in 1862 by Dauud Pasha, the governor

of Mt. Lebanon. In 1886 Nasir al-Din founded a journal in Beirut called *al-Safaʾ* (Clearness). The journal appeared for several months, stopped, and was reestablished in 1898 by his son Amin Nasir al-Din (al-Bʿayni 1984: 95). Like the first generation of their Shiʿi peers who wrote in al-*Irfan*, Druze intellectuals who studied in al-Dauudiya and wrote in *al-Safaʾ* had formulated arguments that would integrate the Druze community within the Muslim *umma* and Arab nation.

Two new schools of thought had emerged among the second generation of Druze intellectuals. The former sought to define Druzes as part of the Arab nation, while insisting on the community's special character. The latter, represented by a smaller group, called for the revival of Muslim unity, including the 'heterodox' communities within a single Muslim *umma*. Abdalla al-Najjar (1896–1976) was one of the leading figures belonging to the first school. In 1924 al-Najjar published *Banu Maʿruf fi Jabal Hawran*, (The Druzes in Mt. Hawran), the first book ever to cover the religious and historical aspects of his community. The first chapter contains reflections about the relationship between *umma* (nation) and *milla* (religious community); these are reminiscent of similar reflections by Shiʿi intellectuals of the same period. Al-Najjar distinguishes between *al-milla* as a religious group and *al-umma* as a national collective. He argues that Islam comprises several *milla*s (religious sects), each with its special characteristics, such as the Druze *milla* whose members are of Arab descent. Al-Najjar presents the main religious issues that differentiate the Druzes from other Muslims. He emphasizes that these issues are esoteric interpretations of Islamic dogmas and not a total deviation from Islam (al-Najjar 1924: 14–15, 18–19, 43–52, 108–109).

Hani Abu Muslih (1893–1971), Ajaj Nuwayhid (1896–1982), and Fuʾad Slim were the prominent representatives of the second group, not only in their verbal discourse, but also in their actions and in their personal behaviour that exemplified assimilation within the orthodox Muslim *umma* (al-Hut 1982: 861–863, 867–871: Nuwayhid 1993: 12–27). Thus, they even showed tolerance towards the marriage of their sisters and daughters with Sunnis. The writings of Nuwayhid still have great influence on Druze literati today. Although he devoted his political activities and most of his writings to the Palestinian cause and to general Arab-Islamic issues, he also published in 1935 a book on the Druze historians and religious scholars who lived before the seventeenth century. Nuwayhid merged his analysis and narrative with the Arab nationalist-Islamic discourse, placing Druze historians and scholars in the mainstream of Islamic heritage (Nuwayhid 1975).

The activities of Ali Nasir al-Din (1888–1974) and Sa'id Taqiy al-Din (1904–1960), two Druze intellectuals from the second generation, illustrate the recourse to polytactic potential instead of the old *taqiyya*. Motivated by deep devotion to Arab nationalism, Nasir al-Din joined several Arab nationalists from Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq to hold an Arab nationalist congress in August 1933 in the Druze village of Qrnayil in Mt. Lebanon. The participants decided to organize *Usbat al-Amal al-Qawmi* (the League for National Action). Not only was Nasir al-Din the secretary of the Lebanese section of the League, he was also one of the League's ideologues who formulated its goals and ideology. Recent studies consider Nasir al-Din as a central figure, whose ideas had great impact on the Arab nationalist parties that emerged after 1946. His book *Qadiyat al-Arab* (The Arab Cause), published in 1946, presents a synthesis of his ideas which have been adopted by *Harakat al-Qawmiyin al-Arab* (The Movement of Arab Nationalists) and the Ba'th Party (Nasir al-Din 1946, rpt. 1963; Badran 1996: 74–110; Bus'id 2004: 56–70; Shlash 2004: 45; al-Tall 1996: 77–100; Saghiyya 2000: 165–188). Taking their cue from Nasir al-Din, many Druze elites and intellectuals in Lebanon and Syria supported Arab nationalist organizations as a vehicle for integration in the political arenas of the two countries, applying their polytactic potential through which they adapted Druze identity to pan-Arab nationalism.

Sa'id Taqiy al-Din provides another clear example for this Druze polytactic potential. He followed his uncle Amin (1884–1927) who, since 1907, had been a member of the circle of Christian Lebanese intellectuals, who called for Lebanese nationalism. Both conceived of *al-uruba* (Arabism) as a revival and development of Arab culture based on the Arabic language (Taqiy al-Din 2004: 43). Sa'id's political and social ideas illustrate his views concerning the various components of the Druze collective identity: Druze communalism, Arab Nationalism, Syrian nationalism and Lebanese patriotism (Taqiy al-Din 2004: 26–31, 92–93).

Even when Sa'id joined the SSNP of Antun Sa'ada in 1949, he argued that his support for the party does not mean that he changed his position toward Greater Lebanon, Greater Syria, and *uruba* (Arabism). In one of his talks, he declared: "I am Lebanese, therefore I am an Arab. Consequently, it is imperative to unite [Greater Syria] into one integral political entity" (Taqiy al-Din 2004: 94). He supported the party, he said, because it was the only one that called for a genuine separation between religion and politics (Taqiy al-Din 2004: 73–81, 95–98).

Ever since the end of the nineteenth century, the socio-economic and cultural development in Syria and Lebanon has exposed Druzes to the outside world and has eroded many traditional elements of their society. No longer isolated in their mountainous localities, many Druze *juhhal* have faced difficulties in getting information about their faith from the *uqqal*. Because the *juhhal*, who constitute the majority of the community, have no direct access to their secret religious literature, their main resort is to rely on secondary sources of the Druze intellectuals. It is, therefore, no wonder to find many Druzes adopting the nationalist discourse of their intellectuals and joining Arab nationalist parties that advocate secular nationalisms. The historical record since 1925 indicates that most of the Druzes have accepted the arguments of their intellectuals regarding the collective identity of the community.

Although their community is a tiny minority in Syria (3 percent), in 1963 Druze officers in the army joined their Isma'ili and Alawi peers in establishing a new political elite in the country. However, as a result of an abortive Druze *coup d'état* in 1966, the Druzes found themselves excluded from this new elite and joined other minorities in supporting the present Syrian regime. By using the Jacobinistic national discourse, as well as polytactic potential strategy, Druzes have attempted to secure slices of power.

Unlike in Syria, the Druzes in Lebanon have played an important role in the politics of the country. The main vehicle for this role is the PSP (Progressive Socialist Party) established in 1949 by the Druze leader Kamal Jumblatt (1919–1977) on the basis of the modern ideologies of socialism, liberal democracy and Arab nationalism. From the 1950s until the late 1970s, the PSP led all the leftist and Arab nationalist parties that opposed the dominance of the ruling elites and the 'corrupt confessional system' in Lebanon. Jumblatt's collected works expound his ideology of Arab nationalism and political thought that recalls many ideas of Shakib Arslan, Ali Nasir al-Din, and other Druze intellectuals who have abandoned *taqiyya* and adopted polytactic potential (Jumblatt 1987). In his reassessment of the *taqiyya*'s role in the Druzes' history, Jumblatt explicitly rejects its interpretation as an act of prudence, arguing that *taqiyya* was an inherent characteristic of the 'Gnostic tradition' to which the Druze faith belongs (Makarem 1966: 7–16).

Although the death of Kamal Jumblatt in 1977 and the confessional strife in the 1980s have eroded the influence of the PSP among non-Druze communities, Walid Jumblatt, the son of Kamal, seeks to cultivate the legacy of his father and maintain the Druze minority's influence on Lebanese national politics.

## Nationalism as the Road to Power: The Alawis in Syria

As in the case of Druzes, the historical record of Alawis-Nusayris shows that *taqiyya* was never an absolute guarantee against hostile treatment. Sunni Muslim scholars and chroniclers placed this minority beyond the pale of the formal Shi'i doctrine. Supported by his extremist followers, Ibn Nusayr (d. 883), the founder of the sect, related himself to the twelfth Shi'i *imam* as his *bab* (door), through which his followers among the Shi'is can reach the inner meaning of *al-imamiyya* (the guidance) of the true faith. By adding the central role of *al-bab* to Shi'ism, the Nusayris claim that their *abwab* (sing. *bab*) were the representatives of the 'true faith' (Massignon 1934). According to them, every Shi'i *imam* had a *bab* on whom the Shi'is rely to understand the 'true faith'. Ibn Nusayr was the *bab* of the last and twelfth imam who had gone into cosmic *ghayba* (concealment) (al-Tawil 1981: 253–256; Uthman 1994: 44–45).

The Nusayris had added another sense to the term *bab* when they placed it within the Trinitarian concept of their faith. They based the concept on the three figures of Ali, Muhammad, and Salman, abbreviated by the letters *A.M.S.* (Bar-Asher and Kofsky 2002: 7–41). Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law, represents *al-ma'na* (the meaning) of the divinity. Muhammad, the Prophet represents *al-ism* (the name) and Salman al-Farisi, one of the prophet's *Sahaba* (Companions) represents *al-bab* (the door). In his interpretation of the Trinitarian concept, Abu Musa al-Hariri (a pseudonym of Butrus al-Qazi) argues that the Prophet Muhammad is no more than an envelop of *al-ma'na*, as a *hijab* (veil) or as a *bayt* (house). In this sense, *al-ma'na* (the meaning) is *al-batin* (the internal) of the divinity that resides within *al-zahir* (the external) in the form of a *bayt* (house) and a *hijab* (veil) that contains the inner meaning. To enter this 'house' one needs a *bab* which is embodied by Salman al-Farisi, through whom believers obtain access to the inner meaning of the divinity (al-Hariri 1984: 24–36). Modern Alawi authors reject this interpretation, claiming that *A.M.S.* is connected with the symbols of letters practiced by the Muslim *sufis* (Uthman 1994: 193–198).

Most of the studies on Nusayris since the nineteenth century focused on the Trinitarian concept of *A.M.S.* Some of these assign great weight to the Christian influence expressed through the concept, to such an extent that some of these studies speculate that the roots of Nusayriyya go back to Christianity (Lammens 1901: 33–50). However, the recent revisionist studies on Nusayriyya reject the 'Christian connection' and relate the Nusayri trinity to the Shi'i legacy (Friedman: 2009).

Unlike the case of the Druzes and the Shi'is, the first generation of intellectuals among the Alawis-Nusayris emerged only on the eve of the mandatory period when they began to name their sect Alawiyya, instead of Nusayriyya (al-Tawil 1981: 448–449). When the new name appeared, educated Alawis began to formulate historical and religious arguments in accordance with the new name. Thus, this name and its religious implications became the subject of a series of six articles entitled "What History has Neglected: The Alawis or the Nusayris", written by Isa Sa'ud, a prominent Alawi sheikh, and published in the Alawi organ of *al-Amani* in Latakia in 1930 and 1931. Distinguishing between the old name and the new one, Sa'ud claims that the Alawis are an authentic Shi'i sect and their name Alawiyya stems from the great love of its members towards Ali. While he emphasizes the new name, Sa'ud alludes to the fact that the name Nusayriyya would revive suspicions among many Muslims (*al-Amani*, November 1930 to May 1931; the full texts of these six articles in al-Ibrahim 1999: 265–280).

Although such suspicions remain, since the Mandate certain Syrian Sunni writers began to adopt the new name, accepting part of the Alawi arguments concerning their faith (Ali 1983, vol. 6: 260–263; al-Sharif 1994). The religious arguments of the Alawis in *al-Amani* had encouraged Shi'i intellectuals in Lebanon to write about the close relationship of the Alawiyya with the Imamate Shi'is (*al-Irfan*, vol. 20, no. 5 December 1930, quoted in Uthman 1994: 11–12). In addition to *al-Amani*, in 1937 educated Alawis established another journal, *al-Nahda* (the Awakening). Conscious of the importance of religion for promoting nationalism, al-*Nahda* invited Sheikh Abd al-Rahman al-Khayr, one of the Alawi *ulama*, to contribute to the new journal. Under the title: "The Awakening of the Alawi Muslims", al-Khayr wrote a series of five articles published in the first issues of *al-Nahda*. In the first article: "Who are the Alawis?" al-Khayr defines the community as 'Imamate Muslims and pure Arabs'. Referring to the non-Muslim and alien rituals of the Alawis, he argues that these rituals were adopted by their populace without the acceptance of their religious elites (the texts in al-Ibrahim 1999: 381–397).

By adding the appellation of 'Muslims' in his title, al-Khayr presented the historical and religious arguments that relate the tenets of the community to the Imamate Shi'is. One month after the publication of this special issue in *al-Nahda*, the most powerful chiefs of the Alawis, including the notorious separatist Salman (Sulayman) al-Murshid, accepted al-Khayr's arguments and signed a memo declaring their attachment to the Ja'fari Shi'i doctrine and to Islam (Uthman 1994: 93).

Until his death in 1986, al-Khayr continued to elaborate his religious arguments that had become the fundamental basis for Alawi writers.

Ten years after his death, his followers collected some of his writings and published them in a special book bearing his name. While the phrase "The Alawi Muslims" was used in the title of his 1937 articles, the collective name 'Alawis' adopted since 1922 was absent from the title of 1996 volume. Thus, the term Alawiyya was replaced with Ja'fariyya, i.e. Imamate Shi'a (al-Khayr: 1996). In order to transform Alawiyya into Ja'fariyya, al-Khayr gives a summary of the main tenets and then presents several declarations, petitions and *fatwa*s of Alawi *ulama* to attest their attachment to the Shi'i creed. He also refers to 'the mistakes' of western scholars who wrote about his community (al-Khayr: 1996: 37–51). The publishers of the volume in 1996 provide a list of 76 books and articles by al-Khayr on religious and nationalist subjects which place the Alawiyya within the Ja'fariyya as well as within Arab nationalism (al-Khayr: 1996: 103–117).

During the 1960s, when sectarianism, regionalism, and factionalism were evoked in the political arena for the power struggle in Syria, al-Khayr chose to republish the book of Muhammad Ghalib al-Tawil, *History of the Alawis*, which was first published in 1924. Al-Khayr himself reedited the book, adjusting it to the new political constellation of the 1960s and to his religious interpretations. Through his long detailed annotations and introduction, al-Khayr portrays the Alawis as a genuine Muslim sect and a pure Arab community whose principal tribes had migrated from Arabia into Syria. A special annotation was dedicated to the overlapping between Alawi and Imamate Shi'i doctrines. Because al-Tawil's book and al-Khayr's comments establish new historical and religious arguments useful for contemporary Alawis, the volume was republished in four editions between 1966 and 1981 (al-Tawil 1981: 5–64).

Most of the recent Alawi books that focus on religious matters take their cue from the ideas formulated by al-Khayr and are prefaced with introductions written by famous contemporary Shi'i religious scholars. These introductions emphasize the Ja'fari characteristics of the Alawi tenets. It is worthwhile noting that these books quote several *fatwa*s and declarations by Sunnis and Shi'is that legitimize the Alawi sect as a Muslim one (the introductions of al-Ibrahim 1995, and Abbas 2000).

However, in order to maximize their influence within the state, since 1946 Alawi intellectuals and politicians preferred to support two models of nationalisms: the Arab or Syrian model in which nationalism is separated from religion, and the other model in which Islam is considered as the main component of the Arab nation. Under the rule of the army and the Ba'th party, which purged tribalism, particularism, and confessionalism from the political discourse, the road was opened for Alawis to enter the political arena under their redefined communal identity. At the socio-political

level, the Ba'th 's *coups d'état* between 1963 and 1970 enabled officers from
minority groups and Sunnis of rural areas to replace the urban and elite
establishment. Ideas that had been developed during the Mandate by the
first Alawi intellectuals had facilitated the integration of the Alawi intel-
ligentsia and leadership into Syria's political life. The role of these Alawis
in the internal political affairs of the community grew stronger while the
national ideologies and discourse were being widely spread through the
printed word and the educational system. Although the Alawi officers in
the Syrian army and political leaders embraced Arab nationalism and its
Jacobinistic discourse, Sunni Muslims have looked upon the Alawis with
suspicion, and ethnic tensions have existed. On several occasions, such as
in 1976 and 1982, confessional conflicts between Sunnis and Alawis have
threatened the political stability of the country.

To de-politicize this confessional cleavage, the Syrian regime of Hafez
and Bashar al-Asad uses different means, such as creating coalitions with
the Sunni religious scholars and partially renewing the intermediary roles of
rural and tribal chiefs. The regime has also thrown wide open the doors to
state bureaucracy. The only condition is that people are loyal to the regime
and to its national ideology and discourse; which confessional background
they have is irrelevant. The question remains however: can the national-
ist ideology and discourse and the Alawi adoption of Shi'i Islam lead the
Alawis toward full integration within Islam and the Arab Syrian nation
when nationalism and similar universal ideologies are eroded by the rise
of Sunni Islamist movements?

## Conclusion

Summing up the analysis, we can say that the polytactic potential was a
successful strategy to empower Shi'is, Druzes, and Alawis as long as nation-
alism, state patriotism and moderate Sunni Islamism prevailed in the politi-
cal arena of the Middle East. However the recent Shi'i-Sunni strife and the
reemergence of extremist Sunni 'Islamist-fundamentalism'[5] in many parts of
the Middle East will arguably harm the strategy of the polytactic potential.
Since 2003, the Shi'i-Sunni strife coupled with the infiltration of extremist

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[5] In Arabic there are two terms, *salafiyya* and *usuliyya* that mean the return to the
Islamic fundamentals. However, using *salafiyya* or *usuliyya* would confuse the reader
because *salafiyya* and *usuliyya* comprise many different schools of thought, some moder-
ate, others radical.

Sunni organizations in Lebanon and Syria has alarmed Shi'i, Druze, and Alawi leaders. New Sunni *da'i*s (religious propagators)—brimming with Sunni extremist passion—have become familiar figures on the political scene of the Lebanese cities of Tripoli, Beirut, Sidon, and in Sunni villages in the Akkar and the Biqa, along the border between Syria and Lebanon. These *da'i*s are very active at propagating Sunni Islamic 'values', attracting many Sunnis affiliated with militant Islamist groups, thus posing new threats to the political order in the two countries. Since 2005, the Lebanese media have quoted statements by Shi'i, Druze, and Alawi leaders urging the authorities to challenge the 'dangerous militant Sunni discourses' that seek to incite communal strife in Lebanon and Syria, similar to those in Iraq. In this sense, what is happening elsewhere in the Middle East can have serious repercussions on the Syrian and Lebanese political arenas.

Some Western and Arab scholars use 'Islamic fundamentalism' to describe radical Shi'i groups; this is an unfortunate misuse of the term. In his study *Islam, the People and the State*, Sami Zubaida (1993) is critical to such misuse, and argues convincingly that there is a difference between Sunni fundamentalism and Shi'i radicalism. The former rejects the modern state and the ideology of nationalism in favour of a universal project based on one Islamic *umma* and state. It aspires to rebuild 'the essence' of Islam embodied in the rule of the Prophet and his Companions. The latter does not seek the same 'inherent essence' of Islam to rebuild the Islamic original State, but simply to awaken the people from their 'slumber' to play a greater role in the politics of the modern State. According to Zubaida, the evolution of Iran since the Revolution, followed by Shi'i militant activism in Lebanon, has lent credence to the difference between Sunni Islamist-fundamentalism and Shi'i radicalism (Zubaida 1993: 18, 23–32, 53–56).

A cogent exposition of the Islamist-fundamentalist notion of *al-umma* in Syria and Lebanon is contained in the theoretical work of Sa'id Hawa (1935–1989), a prominent Syrian Islamist scholar whose ideas continue to inspire many Islamist-fundamentalists in Syria and Lebanon. Dealing with *qawmiyya* (nationalism) and *wataniyya* (patriotism), Hawa argues that Muslims have no collective identity other than Islam, even though they belong to different tribes and linguistic groups. For him, only non-Muslims make their attachment to homelands, ethnic groups, and races the basis of their dominant identities (Hawa 1970: 70–71). Hawa claims that the Islamic message had changed the course of human history when it replaced what he anachronistically calls *al-itar al-qawmi* (the national framework) with the wider cosmopolitan framework of the indivisible Islamic *umma* (Hawa 1970: 111–1112).

To face the new Sunni Islamist trend, Shi'is, Druzes, and Alawis have no alternative but to resort to their polytactic potential because they have already uncovered their specific religious tenets and abandoned *taqiyya*. Thus, they continue to advocate their attachment to secular Arab, or Arab-cum-Islamic, nationalism, and insist on the pluralist characteristic of Islam.

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EDUCATION AND MINORITY EMPOWERMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Catherine Le Thomas

## Introduction

Religious minorities in the Middle East have travelled different historical and political paths, depending on local, regional and international history as much as on their internal evolution. Far from being mere powerless groups dominated by a Sunni or Shiʻi Muslim majority, they have lived through complex economic and cultural conjunctures. Among the events that left a decisive impact on the religious minorities in the Middle East was the European expansion in the region which culminated in the nineteenth century, when the European Powers intervened more or less directly in Ottoman internal affairs under the pretext of protecting the Christian and Jewish minorities. This intervention occurred at various levels—politically, economically, and militarily. As a result, the social fabric of the Ottoman Empire underwent profound changes, not least regarding the economic and social position of the Christian minorities. All over the Empire, increased European involvement in the economy meant an increased demand for services from linguistically and culturally skilled go-betweens, a role Christians and Jews were in a good position to fulfill. In Syria, for example, Christians served as mediators between local agricultural producers and European merchants in the silk trade, as *dragoman*s (translators), or as administrative intermediaries.

The Christians' major asset was their greater familiarity with European languages and the European way of life, acquired through their Western education. Western or 'modern' education is understood here as a form of education that does not have religious knowledge as its only, or its main, goal, contrary to the traditional teaching provided in the Muslim *kuttab* or *madrasa*s and the Christian seminaries. Modern Western education aimed at training laymen, through the teaching of subjects like literature, sciences, and languages—the number of subjects depending on the size of the school. Religion became one subject among several others. Although secularized in its content, education remained, nonetheless, faith-based at the organizational level, as most of the schools were missionary schools,

funded and run by Christian congregations. Modern Western education was brought into the region by the Christian missionaries from the seventeenth century onward. In the wake of European expansion, missionaries enjoyed great freedom to set up schools, an activity that increased remarkably from the seventeenth century onwards and fully blossomed in the nineteenth century. Western education benefited the communities which early came in touch with the missionaries. As time/passed, the local Christians—Armenians, Greeks, Copts, Maronites—also opened their own schools throughout the Ottoman Empire and in Persia (Mayeur-Jaouen 1995). By the end of the nineteenth century, the Christians of the Ottoman Empire were far ahead of the Muslims in terms of school enrollment (Courbage and Fargue 1992: 187). For the Christian minorities throughout the Ottoman Empire, whether in Syria, Irak, Armenia, or Egypt, access to missionary education in the nineteenth century often meant empowerment (Mayeur-Jaouen 1995). More educated, more urban, and more influenced by European culture than their Muslim counterparts, Christians had better economic opportunities than Muslims, and emigration as a means to life improvement was a real possibility for them. Modern education also explained why, in the Arab part of the Empire, Christians held a prominent place in the Arab cultural and political awakening (*al-Nahda*) of the nineteenth century. To a lesser extent, Jews also benefited from European faith-based education, as they had their own schools run by the Mission Israélite. In general, Jews were more educated than Christians in the provinces where modern education was not well spread (e.g. the provinces of Aleppo and Basra), but they were less educated than Christians where missionaries and local actors were more active (e.g. the provinces of Beirut, Mossoul, Baghdad) (Courbage and Fargue 1992: 179). In Irak, both Jews and Christians played the role of 'agents of modernization' and 'transmission belts' between the local Muslim population and the Western Powers (Tsimhoni 1996: 97). These assets had a negative side as well: because of their privileged educational situation and their close contact with Europeans, non-Muslim minorities were often suspected by the Ottoman authorities of being loyal supporters of European interests. Tensions and upheavals in the Empire in the late nineteenth century resulted in massacres in which minorities were often the first victims. The legacy of this history of unequal development and distribution of modern education in the Middle East can still be seen in the political cultures, as well as in the formation of national and communal elites, in present-day Middle Eastern societies.

    To account for these processes, we have chosen to focus on Lebanon, where the Ottoman legacy has been especially salient. First we will analyze

the strong impact of modern missionary education on the local Christian communities, especially among the Maronites and, more broadly, on the Lebanese elites until today. We will then focus more extensively on the case of the Shi'i community, which has experienced the most significant development over the last half-century, and whose relatively recent process of institutionalization and 'catching up' is of an exemplary character. We will explore the role played by education in the empowering process the Shi'is have gone through since the 1960s, and how they opened their own faith-based schools, drawing on various resources and alternative international networks. The choice of these two communities is motivated by their underprivileged legal or political status as minorities during the Ottoman period, and by some similarities as to their geographic settlement (in rural, mountainous regions) (Khury 1990). Despite very different historical trajectories, both communities have experienced rapid cultural and economic changes as a result of internal as well as external developments at some point of their history: the Maronites in the nineteenth century, the Shi'is in the second part of the twentieth century. These two cases illuminate the different ways in which education intervened in the empowerment process of religious minorities in the region.

*The Model of Christian Schools: A Still Influential Historical Precedent*

The Maronite community, a small minority in the Syrian province of the Ottoman Empire, has enjoyed a prominent place in the state of Greater Lebanon created by France in 1920. The historical example of the Maronite community illustrates the importance of the educational system in the mobilization and organization of Christian groups and their access to the State: the opening of schools played a crucial role in the community's mobilization. Starting in the early seventeenth century under the reign of the Emir Fakhr al-Din II (who ruled from 1590 to 1635), the influx of Catholic missionaries, especially from France and Italy (Hanf 1969: 60–74), resulted in the establishment of small schools in Mount Lebanon, led by the Capuchins and Jesuits.[1] From the early seventeenth century, the first

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[1] The Capuchins in particular opened a series of small schools in the mountain, where they taught reading, writing, and arithmetic, as well as English and French. In 1626 they moved to Beirut. In 1645, it was the turn of the Jesuits to start their missionary work in Lebanon, opening small schools whose best students could get a scholarship to study in Rome (Hanf 1969). The Jesuits were replaced by the Vincentians in the late eighteenth century. The missions of the Levant withered away for a period before experiencing a revival from the 1820s onwards (Verdeil-Donzel 2004: 42–43).

contingents of Maronites educated at the Maronite College of Rome, founded in 1584 and administered by the Jesuits,[2] returned to their homeland and set up schools in Mount Lebanon (Labaki 1988: 17). The Maronite Synod of 1736 at Loueizé represented another important milestone in the history of modern faith-based education in Lebanon, as it called upon priests to follow the example of the Rome-educated clergy and open schools (Hanf 1969: 64). Local educational efforts were pursued in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century (Hanf 1969: 65), in tandem with the European commercial expansion in the region. A class of educated Maronites arose and soon enjoyed a certain amount of political influence (Salibi 1992: 50). After the disturbances of 1840 in Mount Lebanon, and in the wake of European political and economic interests, Catholic missionary activity was revived. The Jesuits had established a new mission to Syria in 1830, which led to the opening of a series of schools, especially in the Mountain and the Zahleh region. In the mid-nineteenth century, the Jesuit schools had over 5,400 students in the region corresponding to modern Lebanon (Donzel-Verdeil 2003: 484). The Lazarists were also active in forming a pro-French Maronite elite in the Mountain (Chevallier 1971: 264). At the same time the Catholics faced competition from the newly arrived Anglo-Saxon Protestant missions that were particularly active in the Druze-dominated areas (Salibi 1989: 186). Some Russian initiatives existed among the Orthodox community, but they remained limited, making it necessary for the rich Greek orthodox to send their children to Protestant schools.[3] Italian, German, Swiss and Danish establishments also contributed to making the nineteenth century the century of the development of Christian missionary education in Lebanon, completed by the founding of the American University of Beirut (initially called Syrian Protestant College) by the Protestants in 1866 and the Saint Joseph University by the Jesuits in 1875.[4] Meanwhile, local Christian communities continued to establish their own school systems, aided by the Ottoman tanzimat decree (*Hatt-i humayun*) of February 1856, which endorsed the general trend by allowing communities to establish their own schools under the authority of a Board of Public Education.[5] From the Mountain, the educational movement spread to Beirut: from the 1860s, the Orthodox community opened schools in those

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[2]  The College survived the dissolution of the order in 1773 (Hanf 1969).
[3]  See Longva in this volume.
[4]  For a presentation of nineteenth century Lebanese education see also Favier (2004: 61).
[5]  *Hatt-ı humayun*, paragraph 15 (Hanf 1969: 70).

neighborhoods of Beirut where Orthodox were in majority (Davie 1993: 99). In addition to European missionary schools, Beirut also had schools established by the local Catholic Churches, such as the Maronites, the Greek Melkites (or Greek Catholics) and the Armenian Catholics. These Western-type institutions benefited primarily the Christians[6]—because they were located in Christian areas and the majority of their teaching body and audience were Christian (Atrissi 1979)[7]—and, secondarily, the Druzes in the Mountain.

At the political level, Donzel-Verdeil shows that the Jesuits were involved in the development of Maronite nationalism in the late nineteenth century by encouraging the faithful to gather around their clergy (2003: 551). Several scholars, including Judith Harik (1994: 15) and Fouad Khury (1975: 189), claim that one of the principal reasons for the early organization of the Maronite and Druze communities in the political arena is the early development among them of Christian educational networks. The interactions between Europeans and local Christian communities on the political, economic and cultural levels led to a social institutionalization which favored the advancement of these communities, particularly the Maronites, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The global trend towards nationalism, in which schools were deeply involved, enhanced the capacity of the Maronites to mobilize under the leadership of the Church, and ultimately favored their political and economic hegemony over the young mandate State established by France in 1920 with the support of the Maronite Patriarch Hoyek.

In contrast, Muslims were still lagging behind in terms of modern secularized education (Labaki 1988: 57). Members of the Muslim elite resorted to the few Ottoman public schools created in Syria, or to Christian schools (Bocquet 2005). The Ottoman authorities had started to open modern public schools, mainly in the big cities after the 1839 tanzimat reforms, to strengthen their military power and train civil servants. A network of public primary schools was later set up after the passing of the General Law on Education in 1869. These schools provided religious as well as basic practical knowledge, and replaced the traditional Islamic madrassas. This

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[6] Private non-religious educational institutions only appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century. The National College (*kulliya wtaniyya*) was founded in Beirut in 1863 by Butros al-Bustani, with the aim to reconcile the Lebanese after the 1860 massacres (Labaki 1988: 52).

[7] For the same reason, Christians were better educated and attended the missionary schools more often, not only in Lebanon but also in Syria and in Irak (Hourani, 1947: 70).

school system aimed at promoting the ideology of the Empire according to the conservative principles of the Hamidian era; but it also aimed at combating rival educational systems, particularly missionary schools.

Students enrolled in the Ottoman schools were overwhelmingly Muslims, as the institutions were intended to be a synthesis between Islam and modernity. However, this educational policy remained limited in scope. In 1914 there were about 125 primary public schools and three secondary schools in what corresponds to current Lebanon, among them the Sultaniyyeh College, opened in 1897 (Hanf 1969: 71). Meanwhile, the Sunni community of Syria began to establish its own secular schools toward the end of the nineteenth century, in response to demands by a rising elite, itself educated in Christian schools. In Beirut, the Sunni notabilities created the association al-Maqased[8] al-Khayriyya al-Islamiyya in 1878. Formed under the leadership of Midhat Pasha, governor of the province of Damascus, the Maqased association explicitly aimed at challenging the Western missionary schools by opening 'modern' secular schools which, at the same time, observed the religious and cultural traditions of the group. It rapidly established secondary schools in Beirut and Mount Lebanon (Labaki, 1988: 21), but could not compete with the more prestigious and experienced Christian schools. In the early twentieth century, more than three quarters of the total number of students enrolled in Lebanon were registered in Catholic schools; this proportion was still about a half in 1939 (Abou Rjaily, 1981).

During the Mandate, state schools and Catholic schools complemented each other to educate new generations committed to the regime. While the former were mainly destined for under-privileged Muslim children, the latter attracted the elite and formed one of the pillars of the Maronite power structure. In those days, Lebanese education was said to be "predominantly Christian and clerical in spirit and control, and more particularly Catholic" (Hourani 1947: 67).

The number of Christian students was far greater than that of Muslims, particularly in secondary and higher education. A majority of the high-ranking civil servants were French-speaking Christians, most of whom had graduated from the University Saint Joseph or the French Law School in Beirut, which was then a branch of the University of Lyon. From 1919, the French School of Law also became "a supporter of French policy in Syria

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[8] The term *maqased* refers to the laudable intentions, the pious plans and the commendable goals that a pious man should have.

that [taught] its students to "serve France" and "defend the principle of
the Mandate" (Verdeil 2004: 151). Moreover, from 1926 to 1952, six out of the
seven Presidents of the Republic of Lebanon were former students of the
Jesuit schools.[9]

While the proportion of students enrolled in Catholic schools decreased
significantly in the decades following independence, due to the expansion of
free public education and the rise of new private schools, Catholic schools
still enrolled 30 percent of Lebanese students in the late 1990s, as against
34 percent for public schools and 36 percent for other private schools
(Muslim, Christian and secular).[10] In the 2000s, the Catholic school system
still has an extensive network of nearly 300 schools, run by 59 groups and
congregations and with approximately 200,000 students enrolled.[11] More
than any other religious or even local community schools, Catholic schools
are still regarded by most Lebanese as being elite schools. Present in the
whole country and not only in Christian areas, they have a high percentage
of Muslim students nowadays.[12] However, while many Lebanese political
and cultural leaders in the past were educated in elite French-speaking
Catholic schools, this monopoly is now being challenged by a very strong
demand for education in English in the context of globalization.

This recent development notwithstanding, Christian education seems
to have become the consecrated model, both organizationally and
institutionally, in independent Lebanon, especially during and after the
1975–1990 Civil War: formerly in a quasi-monopoly position, it has been
emulated in various ways, and the result is a flowering of new faith-based
Islamic schools, whose sponsors themselves willingly admit their debt to
their Christian predecessors. Emulating the Christian model does not only
apply to the school systems: this method of community institutionalization,
of which the Maronites were the primary beneficiaries, has become in the

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[9] Charles Debbas (1926–1934), Habib Saad (1934–1936), Emile Eddé (1936–1941), Alfred
Naccache (1941–1943), Petro Trad (1943), Bechara el-Khoury (1943–1952) (Muawwad
2008).

[10] http://www.opuslibani.org.lb/liban/Dos004.htm. According to the statistical booklet
published by the Lebanese Centre for Research and Educational Development, 38,5 percent
of Lebanese students were enrolled in public schools in 2002–2003 (primary, middle and
high school levels).

[11] Interview, Marwan Tabet, general secretary of the Catholic Schools of Lebanon,
November 2007.

[12] On the national level Muslims make up nearly one quarter of the students at Catholic
schools. They are an overwhelming majority in some schools in southern Lebanon or in the
Beqaʿa. Interview, Mawan Tabet, November 2007. Muslim students are also the majority in
Catholic schools in West Beirut.

twentieth century "the ideal type of organization adopted by all parties."
(Beydoun 2004: 29). Most religious groups have implicitly tried to reproduce
the Maronite or Christian 'success story' through formally institutionaliz-
ing their communal networks along similar lines (Beydoun 1994: 108). In
this sense, one could say that the collective organization of the Lebanese
socio-political system is strongly dependent on certain historical structures.
It is possible to speak of institutional isomorphism to describe the organi-
zational similarity between different communities, the school being one
of the pillars of this organization, and one that facilitates access to power.
Despite these common tendencies, however, different communities accord
different degrees of importance to the role played by clerics and politicians
in their educational system and, in these matters each community borrows
practices from a variety of religious and political sources. The result is a
number of hybrid models which, while applied in the pursuit of different
socio-religious objectives, have a similar goal: communal empowerment.

### The 'Coming of Age' of a Sociological Minority: The Shiʿi Community and Its Educational System

The case of the Shiʿi community and its evolution over the last fifty years is
one of the clearest examples of an educational institutionalization linked
to the empowerment of the group that promotes it. This educational devel-
opment represents as well as accompanies a set of particularly important
socio-political mobilizations within the Shiʿi community since the 1960s.
Once seen as a 'sociological minority', the Shiʿis have long suffered from
social and political marginalization in modern Lebanon, in spite of their
demographic weight. Today, they represent nearly one third of the Lebanese
population and have a substantial political weight in the Lebanese conso-
ciative system of power sharing. Education, whether public or private, has
played, and still plays, an important role in this empowerment process.

As a heterodox Muslim minority, the Shiʿis were not recognized as a
separate entity in the Ottoman Empire. For many centuries, due to their
isolation, the Shiʿis of Jabal Amil were left to their own devices in their
fortified villages. They were subject to indifference, and occasionally, to
persecutions, as was the case during the era of al-Jazzar Pasha, who was
sent to Jabal Amil in the eighteenth century to reassert Ottoman control
over the region. As for the Northern Beqaʿa region, another Shiʿi stronghold,
it was dominated by clans and prominent families, such as the Harfoush
and the Hamadeh, who had played a dominant role in the seventeenth and

eighteenth centuries in connection with the emirate of Mount Lebanon. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there was no real sense of a common identity or common economic and political interests between the two main regions of Shi'i settlement; links and exchanges remained relatively limited. Differentiated ways of life partly account for this phenomenon: while the Beqa'a region was oriented towards farming and a tribal type of social organization, the economy of Jabal Amil, in the South, was based on the cultivation of tobacco and citrus, articulated around a system of small landholdings. These different patterns of economic and social organization accentuated the divisions between the two regions; besides, traditionally the Beqa' was oriented towards Damascus, whereas Jabal Amil was linked to the commercial center of Haifa until 1948. On the administrative level, this discontinuity was intensified by the fact that Northern Beqa'a was included, from 1860 until 1914, within the autonomous *mutasarrifiyya* (district) of Mount Lebanon, while Jabal Amil was at first part of the *wilayat* (province) of Sidon, then of the *wilayat* of Beirut upon its creation in 1888 (Beydoun 2004: 27). Both regions were organized around a traditional or 'feudal' system in which notables, known as *zu'ama*, played a key role; these leaders represented the group and maintained a certain *status quo*, despite the increasing emergence of a modernizing merchant elite eager to change the balance of power. The clerics or *ulama*, meanwhile, enjoyed only limited independence vis-a-vis the *zu'ama*. They appeared poorly organized as a clerical group, and managed a very limited set of *awqaf* (religious endowments) compared to the Christian Churches (Beydoun 2003: 77). The majority of the Shi'i clergy supported the existing socio-political order, except for the action of a few reformist *ulama*.

While facilitating the emergence of communities with a legal status and institutions defined by the terms of the Constitution of 1926, mandate Lebanon, established in 1920, favored the Maronite community. Traditionally close to French interests, this community had already been well structured for some time. Independent Lebanon, which emerged in 1943, was then shaped by a compromise between Maronites and Sunnis, a fact which reflected and reinforced the peripheral status of the Shi'i community, whose political organization was still embryonic. This marginal position on the political scene found its economic and geographic expression in the Shi'is' concentration amongst the poor and in the rural, marginal areas of Lebanon. Similarly, the first half of the twentieth century was marked by a lag in the dissemination of modern secular education in the predominantly Shi'i regions, by contrast with the prevailing situation in Beirut or Mount Lebanon (Jaber 1978: 214). In 1931, more than 80 percent

of the inhabitants of Jabal Amil were illiterate (Rondot 1947). According to other corroborating sources, the illiteracy rate in 1932 was 83 percent among Shi'is, compared with 66 percent among Sunnis, 53 percent among Greek Orthodox and Druzes, 48 percent among Maronites and 39 percent among Greek Catholics (Labaki 1988: 87). At the time, Christian schools attracted most of the lay elites of the South, especially among former migrants. In the early twentieth century, these elites were sending their children to well-known schools like the boarding convent of Mashmusheh (Jezzine district), the Antonine Sisters' school in Nabatiyyeh, the Franciscan schools in Tyre, and the Orthodox school of Marjayoun, supported by Russia since the 1860s.

It is important to point out that traditional Islamic education had existed for centuries in Southern Lebanon. It was taught by clerics within the kuttab system as a preparation for potential higher studies in Najaf or Qom. This tradition represented a very lively and prestigious cultural heritage, but it concerned only a very small fringe of the population (Bazzi 1995: 125–126). The education was of a religious nature, run by clerics whose reputation had sometimes spread beyond the borders of Jabal Amil across the entire Shi'i world (Jaber 1978: 58). The launching of modern and partially secular schools is a question which had been discussed in the region since the late nineteenth century, but it was slow to materialize due to the rivalries between the clergy and the competing notable families (Mervin 2000: 146, 179).

The efforts made by some Shi'i elites to set up secular faith-based schools for the community finally resulted in the opening of the Amiliyyeh school in Beirut in the 1920s, followed by the Ja'afariyyeh school in Tyre in the mid-1930s. Although these two institutions had a symbolic significance for the community, they remained of modest proportion and could not compete with the older Christian schools. In predominantly Shi'i areas, the illiteracy rate was still 68.9 percent in 1943, compared to 31.5 percent in the Catholic communities (Picaudou 1989: 103), despite the development of a new system of public schooling under the Mandate. It was not until the 1960s, partly under the influence of Musa al-Sadr, an Iranian cleric of Lebanese descent, that new community schools dedicated to training the youths of the region were founded near Tyre. Al-Sadr particularly favored the opening of a technical school in Burj al-Shamali (Tyre district) and a nursing school in Tyre. These were, however, modest achievements, and access to education for the Shi'is at the time still took the form of attending public schools, or, for the elite, Christian schools, and after graduation, the public Lebanese University, established in 1953. From its inception, the

Lebanese University played an important role in the social mobility of a significant fraction of young Shi'is, and of young Lebanese in general.

The current integration of the Shi'is at all levels of the society and in the Lebanese political system thus appears as the result of relatively recent changes and mobilizations. In the 1960s, a series of economic and demographic changes—a generalization of commercial agriculture, rural migration, urbanization, financial flows arising from emigration to Africa or America, natural growth—took place: these were boosted by the policies of president Fu'ad Chehab, which opened up and improved access to public education. As a result, a strong political commitment emerged on the part of Shi'is who were increasingly well-educated and less dependent on the local elites. State schools played a major role in the collective upward mobility of the Shi'i community in the 1960s and 1970s, and contributed to its politicization. Inscribing these demands into a communal framework was by no means an easy process, given the ideological polarization and the growth of leftist movements during those decades. The achievement was mainly the work of imam Musa al-Sadr, founder of the Movement of the Disinherited (*Harakat al Mahrumin*) in 1973, then of the armed organization Amal in 1975. This militia then became the main instrument for the rapid insertion of the Shi'is as a community within the Lebanese political arena in the early 1980s. At the same time Hezbollah was being built by the merging of different Shi'i Islamic groups under the influence of the Iranian revolution. Hezbollah soon became the new main communal actor; under its influence, the Sh'i community underwent a process of militant re-Islamization. The number of clerics and their role in the community grew perceptibly, making them the major communal entrepreneurs, as evidenced by their place in the organization of many community structures put in place during the Civil War. The rise and 'coming of age' of the Shi'i community were especially significant during the 1990s, as the Maronite community went through a leadership crisis at the end of the war, and as the Sunni community, under the leadership of its new elite, sought to invest in political rather than military power. A corollary of the community's social and political mobilizations has been the multiplication of institutions more or less identified with Shi'i Islam or with groups formed in reference to Shi'ism. The trend was particularly striking in the educational field. While for some time the Shi'is had been making use of education facilities external to their community, in the 1970s, and during the Civil War, they set up a growing number of endogenous institutions of education and socialization which drew on diverse financial resources. By the late 2000s, there were about 90 general and technical schools run by Shi'i associations, with over

70,000 students from kindergarten to the last year of high school.[13] *Mutatis mutandis*, the social and institutional dynamics experienced by the Shi'i community at the end of the twentieth century could be compared to that of the Maronites in the middle of the nineteenth century, when Catholic schools went through a remarkable development.

The majority of Shi'i schools belong to networks widely known for their political and/or religious links to the community. They can be roughly divided into three main groups. The first group is, directly or indirectly, linked to Hezbollah and includes: al-Mahdi schools: founded in 1993 by the party (about fifteen schools and 13,500 students in 2005), they seem to have relatively limited autonomy; al-Mustafa schools: created in 1984 (8,500 students in 2005), indirectly placed under the control of the second in command of the party, Naim Qasem; and al-Imdad schools (3,500 students) created in Lebanon in the 1980s by representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The other two groups are Amal al-Tarbawiyya schools (approximately 10,000 students), founded by Amal, the political movement headed by Nabih Berri; and the Mabarrat schools (more than 20,000 students in 2009) founded by Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, a prominent Shi'i religious figure with ambivalent ties to Hezbollah, who died in July 2010. Moreover, as in other communities, there are schools founded by individual leaders for commercial purpose, as well as all those which offer a more or less religious education, depending on the definition adopted; these can be added to the recognized associative corpus. These private schools often relate to their religious community in terms of symbolic affiliation and audience. They are rather difficult to identify, but their numbers are far from small, particularly in Beirut's Southern suburbs. They too contribute, actively or accidentally, to the strengthening of the community. Finally, as in the case of the Sunni and Christian communities, we find institutions which might be termed 'MP schools', i.e schools belonging to Members of Parliament who use their families' involvement in educational activities as a basis from which to launch their political careers: one example is the Beydoun family who owns the Amiliyyeh schools; another example is Hussein Iatim, a member of the Amal movement and a deputy of Beirut from 1996 to 2000 (Le Thomas 2009: 282–288). In total, at the primary and

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[13] These statistics, as well as those that follow, have been obtained from brochures and interviews made with participants in different networks (Autumn 2005 and Autumn 2006). These are also the statistics that the groups declare to the Ministry of Education, and which are published in the *Dalîl al-Madâris* (*School Guide*) of the Ministry of Education every two years.

secondary education level, the major Shiʻi educational associations now enroll more students than the major Sunni school networks. This Shiʻi communal educational sector has mainly developed since the 1970s; it is more or less directly connected to the community, which often supports it. These developments also signal a clear confessionalization of the group, visible in its leadership and in the prominence of religious symbols used by these institutions.

In contrast, as a community, the Shiʻis are only moderately represented in the private sector of Lebanese higher education.[14] There is currently only one Shiʻi university, the Islamic University, opened in 1996 in South Beirut (Khaldé) and supervised by the Shiʻi Higher Islamic Council, the central communal body of the Shiʻi community. For the moment this university is still relatively small. Although commercial institutions of higher education have proliferated in Lebanon in recent years as a result of a permissive policy followed by the government in the 1990s (Bashshur, 2003: 169), the universities of Christian origin remain the leading private academic institutions with a certain influence in Lebanon,[15] alongside the public Lebanese University, where the majority of Lebanese students are enrolled. Thus, if the institutionalization of Shiʻi education has developed dramatically in recent years, this has so far happened mainly in the sector of primary and secondary education, not in the private university sector. The ongoing communalization of some faculties of the Lebanese University, which allows movements such as Amal to take control of parts of this very fragmented institution, may be one of the reasons for this prioritization.

By reinforcing the group structure through the setting up of school networks, the Shiʻis, like other communities before them, seek to acquire additional resources with which to negotiate a more significant place within a rapidly evolving system. At the same time, these schools are also a locus for redefining a plural and constantly changing collective identity and for objectifying socio-political and religious standards for the community. Although the institutions in question rarely call themselves 'Shiʻi', the symbols deployed everywhere in and around these facilities are all identifying signs in this regard, as are the general atmosphere and the chosen methods

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[14]  There are more than 40 establishments of higher learning (Institutes and Universities) officially recognized in Lebanon.

[15]  The major institutions are the Saint Joseph University, Notre Dame, La Sagesse, and Kaslik for the Catholics; Balamand for the Greek Orthodox community; the American University originally Protestant, and Haigazian for the Armenian community.

of religious and political socialization. Furthermore, they attract students almost all of whom come from this community.

The techniques of religious socialization which have been developed in these schools can be found elsewhere in other communities as well, although the content may differ. The major differences include the organization of religious or scholastic ceremonies, the display of an iconography characteristic of the group in question, a fairly dense marking of their territory, and the use of a language, values, and standards adapted to the school environment. Here, as in Catholic or Sunni schools, religion and history classes are devised strategically, according to the politico-religious identity projected by the group that runs the school, but also according to more strictly practical considerations, such as the established norms for the passing of official exams.

Catholic schools have provided and still provide a model for the Shiʻi faith-based schools as far as educational organization and extracurricular activities are concerned. Shiʻi scouts activities, for instance, were created in conjunction with the schools, as an Islamic avatar of the Christian scouting model. To some extent, one can speak of a mirror structure between Catholic schools and their Shiʻi counterparts. The teachers and school administrators who have played an active role in this transfer, are often themselves former students of Catholic schools.

Shiʻi (Islamic) faith-based schools, from this common basis, now seek to assess their originality by inscribing their initiatives in a more global framework, borrowing methods and techniques directly at the global level. Since they have very little experience to draw on, the major Shiʻi schools have chosen, with varying degrees of success, to rely on 'educational modernity', that is, the resolute adoption of advanced techniques and methods, usually of Western origin. This strategy is often combined with a refusal to assimilate certain values associated with Europe or the United States, like secularism, individualism and liberal morals. The most telling example of this can be found in al-Mabarrat Islamic schools, where globalization, productivity, performance and devotion are emphasized altogether, in a more visible way than in most Catholic schools. The same insistence on performance and modernity can be found in other Shiʻi Islamic school networks, at least on the level of rhetoric, and despite great variation in quality standards. Implicitly or explicitly, the Christian school model is also something with which one has to compete; some of the Shiʻi schools try to become themselves models for Catholic schools.

Despite some modest efforts at coordination, the Shiʻi educational field remains characterized by competition between networks affiliated

to different independent movements. This is unlike the Catholic schools, which have been federated since 1950 in a General Secretariat, which acts as interlocutor with the State. The Shiʻi educational field thus reflects the diversity of religious and political centres within the Shiʻi community; at the same time, because the schools serve the educational needs of the Shiʻi population throughout Lebanon, they also act as a unifying element for the community at the institutional level.

The funding for these schools is an elusive matter. It seems to derive from various Shiʻi voluntary associations as well as from large, international religious or political networks. However, here as in other communities, the major source of funding remains the tuition fees: these schools have now reached self-sufficiency, according to their managers, and are mostly financed by fees paid by their students, except for orphans of Hezbollah martyrs, whose tuition fees are covered by associations close to Hezbollah. Because most Catholic schools usually ask for high tuitions, which many members of the middle classes can no longer afford in the 2000s, a number of students have recently moved to public schools or cheaper private ones. Islamic schools, which are often less expensive than Catholic establishments, attract the Shiʻi lower middleclass and sometimes even capture some of the Shiʻi clients of Catholic schools, for whom they represent an alternative.

On the whole, these new Shiʻi schools—which the poor are usually unable to attend—are meant for families concerned about their status within the group, and who shun the public school system discredited since the Civil War. The recent rise of Shiʻi schools thus reflects a concern for social advancement, coupled with a process of communal identity politics. Schools, especially private schools, are perceived to be a key instrument for individual and collective upward mobility, while being reinserted into a preexisting theological framework, which holds knowledge in high esteem.

In the long run, the use of schools as part of the group's empowerment process highlights a series of 'embedded' mobilizations, since the opening of communal schools can be considered as the result of some of these mobilizations and the precondition for others. In this process education plays an important role, both on the institutional level and on that of collective identity. The foundation of a series of schools also illuminates the power strategies of the Shiʻi leaders in the twentieth century, and appears as organically linked to the political and religious fields. The Shiʻis' strategies are not exceptional within the Lebanese context. Similar changes have occurred, although over a longer period and in a somewhat less dramatic manner, in the Sunni and the Druze communities. Examples from other

Lebanese communities could be called upon to support the analysis of the relationship between educational institutionalization and community empowerment. The fact that most of the communal networks have foreign connections, whether religious or political, whether to France, Iran or the Gulf countries, show that the communities in question are tuned to the world and well integrated in transnational networks, from which they derive part of their influence. Some of these tendencies were already at work under the Ottoman Empire. What we are seeing here are different reproductions of the initial organizational model, born under the influence of European Christian missionaries and their local allies. Various versions of this organizational model have developed at different periods, depending on the relative strengths and loyalties within the community, and they are inspired by very diverse local and international sources.

### Beyond Lebanon: States, Minorities and the Diffusion of Westernized Education

What is true for Lebanon is, on the whole, true also for the rest of the Middle East. Access—or lack thereof—to Western-modelled education from the seventeenth century onwards had important consequences for the political and symbolic position of minorities in the late Ottoman Empire, and subsequently in colonial and post-independence states. Groups that came early in contact with mission schools went through a process of empowerment while groups that did not remained largely marginalized. The Shiʻi communities of the Ottoman Empire, in particular, could not benefit from the growing European penetration, and most of them were twice disempowered: in relation to the ruling Sunni majority, and in relation to the other minorities with privileged access to modern European education.

This education was further developed through the creation of public educational systems during the colonial period following the fall of the Ottoman Empire. In most cases, public education was secular or based on Christian values in the colonies, and it gave lesser importance to Islamic subjects; religion became just one subject among others. Curricula, examinations, schedules, were all copied on European educational models. Although never colonized, Afghanistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey also introduced modern Western-type education in the nineteenth or early twentieth century (Daun and Walford 2004: 7).

In Iran, Western education was introduced in the nineteenth century in the wake of European influence: some students were sent to Europe, and

some European schools were opened in the country by French, English and American missionaries to serve the needs of Christian minorities (Naraghi 1992: 91). Students from minorities as well as the ruling elites enrolled in these mission schools which were established in the major Iranian cities. Here, as in the Ottoman Empire, Jews benefited from the educational services provided by the French-based Alliance Israélite Universelle. By the end of the nineteenth century, later than in the Ottoman Empire, a Western-modelled Iranian endogenous education appeared as a response to this foreign model. This kind of modern education was systematized by the Pahlavi dynasty (1925–1979) which developed a primary and secondary public education, mainly based on the French model that aimed at developing a secular middleclass. Meanwhile, from 1927, foreign schools had to abide by official educational programs at all levels, while their Muslim students were prohibited from attending classes in Christian religion. As a result of this restriction the popularity of foreign schools slowly declined in Iran (Naraghi 1992: 150).

After World War II, most of the new independent states in the Middle East continued in the path of formal Western modelled education. They maintained the structures of the inherited educational systems, changing its content and broadening its scope more or less successfully. As for the Christian congregations, after the heyday of the late nineteenth century, they were faced with growing suspicion in the era of Arab nationalism. Under several of the Arab regimes which arose out of the independence movements, private schools of a religious character, in particular those of religious minorities, were nationalized in the name of a certain conception of national unity. This is the case in Syria, where the Ba'thist regime decided in 1967 to nationalize the educational institutions founded by the missionaries in the nineteenth century: these institutions, here as in Lebanon, had favored Christians and the Sunni notables (Bocquet 2005). The Ba'thist regime promoted a unitary conception of society, precisely as a way of pushing into the background the fact that, since 1963, the system was dominated by a minority from the Alawite community. This religious community went from being a peripheral and marginalized minority to being the community most favored by the regime. The Alawis also benefited from modern public education in their empowerment process, as they had access to better state educational services in the predominently Alawi Lattakieh area. The Ba'thist regime thus modified the balance of power between the different religious minorities of Syria in the political as well as the social fields, and one of the mechanisms was the redistribution of the national educational resources.

More generally, in the twentieth century various Muslim minorities experienced a process of empowerment—albeit a relative one—through public education: just like the Shi'is of Lebanon in the 1960s, they used modern state schools or non-communal private schools as a way to achieve collective upward mobility and as a prerequisite for their cultural and political mobilization. The establishment of communal religious or secular schools is often a consequence of their socio-political emergence rather than a precondition for it, and is generally related to the structure of opportunities granted by the regime in place.

In Iran, after the 1979 Revolution, the Islamic Republic introduced a shift in formal education, changing the curricula and the texbooks so as to promote an Islamized, Shi'itized, and revolutionnary type of education. The study of religion was emphasized, and new role models from the Islamic era were proposed to the children. Nevertheless, the Islamic regime retained the Western-type organizational model of education and did not revert to traditional Islamic education, which had gradually weakened in the country (Daun and Walford 2004: 77). Minority schools, whether Zoroastrian, Jewish, Armenian, Assyrian, or Chaldean, saw their autonomy reduced.[16] Restrictions were put on teaching of language and religion, as the regime produced a series of common religious texts for Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians (Sanasarian 2000: 76–84); religion can only be taught in Persian. In doing so, the Islamic Republic produced its own version of modern education. At the same time, it tried to control the religious and potentially political dimension of minority schools, as they were suspected of fostering nationalist views for their groups. Here as in other cases throughout the region, a competitive rather than complementary relation can be observed between government and minority schools: the stronger the former, the less room for maneuver for the latter, particularly in authoritarian or semi-authoritarian contexts.

Nowadays, several movements actively promote faith-based, Islamic private modern teaching throughout the Muslim world. Some of these movements are minority-based, while others try to spread a specific, sometimes politicized, conception of Sunni Islam. The Muslim Brothers in Jordan, Palestine and Egypt provide an historical example of Muslim educational activities. These unfolded in a context in which Christian minorities had already had their own schooling networks for a long period. An interesting parallel could be drawn with developments in Central Asia.

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[16]  The Baha'i are not officially recognized as a religious minority.

With the Central Asian countries acceding to independence in 1991, Fethullah Gulen, a Muslim Turkish cleric, established a whole series of private Turkish Islamic schools among the Turkic populations in the region. In 1997, his association was running about 75 such establishments in Central Asia (Balci 2003: 145). According to Balci, Fathullah Gulen's movement is a "kind of missionnary congregation", and could be compared to a "Turkish Jesuit movement". Gulen's schools combine faith and modernity and promote technology and languages with the aim of forming an elite in Turkey and Turkic-speaking countries. Like the Christian missionaries in the nineteenth century, Muslim religious groups today are paying close attention to education as a tool of empowerment and religious mobilization in the Middle East and beyond, so as to create new religious elites likely to play an active role on the political stage.

## Conclusion

While education obviously cannot, by itself, be a sufficient yardstick for assessing the power of a minority and its historical trajectory, the close relationship between education, politics, and religion in the Middle East makes it a particularly relevant field in the study of community dynamics. In Lebanon and, more broadly the Middle East, the existence or absence of religiously based private schools is revealing of the power strategies and trajectories of a minority group (whether demographically or sociologically defined) and of its relationship to the State.

Education in this region, whether public or private, has been a preferred method of upward mobility for religious minorities, particularly during the Ottoman Empire, when some of these minorities had already achieved a high degree of communal organization. Modern education first spread among Christians and Jews. This phenomenon had important consequences in that it gave some of these minorities a social and even political power which lasted until late in the twentieth century. The colonial and postcolonial Middle Eastern states adopted different versions of these modern school systems, most of which were Islamized and/or Arabized in the 1950s. In doing so, they tried to reach a compromise between borrowed Western-style models and local values and ideologies.

In this context, some Muslim minorities could also accede to modern education. They accumulated new resources so as to create their own structures and narratives. Other private school networks, whether faith-based or not, have rendered the situation of formal schooling in the region more

complex. On the whole, since the nineteenth century, mass education on the Western model has spread through various channels and by-passed traditional religious educational institutions, thus reorganizing the balance of power between the various ethno-religious groups in the Middle East, often to the benefit of minorities open to foreign influences. Nowadays, new forms of modern faith-based schools are still being put in place in various communities throughout the Middle East, redrawing in the process the interactional map between 'majorities' and 'minorities' and their respective resources and power. The study of the links between education, religious groups, and politics in the Middle East can throw light on the role played by education as these groups mobilize in search for political and social self-empowerment.

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## ALEVIS IN TURKISH POLITICS

### Ali Çarkoğlu and Nazlı Çağın Bilgili

### *Introduction*

The religious scene in modern Turkey is often described in a way that conceals diversity. In so far as any reference to religious minorities is made, these groups are assumed to solely consist of non-Muslims, ignoring the sizeable Muslim minority groups. This misrepresentation of the religious character of modern Turkey's population can be traced back to the Peace Treaty of Lausanne of July 1923, which effectively shaped the foundation of the Republican regime in the international arena. In its definition of religious minorities whose rights are to be protected by the new Republican regime, the Treaty of Lausanne is exclusively concerned with non-Muslim groups. No similar explicit recognition can be found for Muslim minorities, whether ethnic groups, such as the Kurds, or religious groups, such as the Alevis.[1] Both the Kurds and the unrecognized religious groups posed a formidable challenge to the young Republic in its formative years. The Republic answered this challenge by systematically denying the existence of ethnic or sectarian differences among the Anatolian populations. Over the years, a hegemonic discourse of ethnic and religious homogeneity, which denies recognition to ethnic and sectarian minorities, developed in the country. In the aftermath of the Cold War, as Turkey's domestic as well as international policies underwent radical changes, due especially to closer relations with the European Union (EU) and the start of membership negotiations in 2005, the hegemonic discourse and the related public practices have increasingly been challenged. There is today a growing recognition

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[1] The section concerning minority rights of the treaty clearly stipulates that the articles therein "shall be recognized as *fundamental* laws, and that no law, no regulation, nor official action shall conflict or interfere with these stipulations, nor shall any law, regulation, nor official action prevail over them." In Article 38, the assurances are granted that "full and complete protection of life and liberty of all inhabitants of Turkey without distinction of birth, nationality, language, race or religion." As such, all minority rights, be it of Muslim or non-Muslim origin, could find protection under the Lausanne Treaty.

of the country's ethnic and religious diversity, even though limitations and severe pressures upon certain groups still exist.

The Turkish religious scene is marked by two distinct cleavages. The first is based on sectarian differences between Sunnis and Alevis (White and Jongerden 2003; Shankland 2003); the second is based on lifestyle and cultural differences among the Sunnis, between those who adopt a lifestyle in accordance with the tenets of Sunni Islam and those who take a more secular (*laik*) view of life. Alevis have historically been the minority which has stood almost uniformly behind the secularist regime since the beginning. Alevis consider the secularist principles as their protection against Sunni infringements upon their religious freedom. Among Sunnis, there are various conservative traditions which can be described as 'pro-Islamist'. They support a religious revivalism in reaction to the secularist policies of the Republican establishment. The two divides, between Sunnis and Alevis on the one hand, and among the Sunnis themselves on the other, are at the source of political tensions in the country. The protagonists here are, on the one side, the secularist state establishment and its centrist mass public support (consisting primarily of Alevis) and, on the other, the Sunni peripheral masses of pro-Islamist inclinations.[2]

The Alevis are thus not a powerless minority; in the center-periphery dichotomy they side with the center, in other words, with the secularist state establishment. Hence, whatever marginalization they may suffer from, due to the sectarian division, is partially compensated by the power gained as they position themselves on the right side of the cultural divide between 'religious' versus 'secular'. Yet, the nature of the secular regime prevents the full recognition of Alevi identity, Alevi religious and cultural practices, and Alevi political preferences concerning the recognition of their identity. Our aim in this chapter is primarily to explore the contours of political empowerment and disempowerment among Alevis in Turkey. We will first give a brief description of Alevism, followed by details about population

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[2]  We adopt here the center-periphery framework of Şerif Mardin (1973). According to this framework, Turkish politics is built around a strong and coherent state apparatus, or the "center", run by a distinct group of elites dominated by the military and bureaucracy. The 'center' is confronted by a heterogeneous and often hostile 'periphery', composed mainly of peasantry, small farmers, and artisans. Kemalist secular principles form the founding ideology of this center which runs a nationalist modernization program. The 'periphery' is built around hostile sentiments towards the coercive modernization projects of the center and includes regional, religious, and ethnic groups with often conflicting interests and political strategies.

characteristics; we will then look into Alevi political alignments in the Republican era, focusing particularly on the most recent developments.

## The Alevi Population

Except for a couple of serious clashes in the 1970s and 1980s, the historical animosities between the Alevi and Sunni communities have been kept mostly under control during the Republican era.[3] Nevertheless, as Alevis have moved into urban areas over the years, they keep their sectarian identity concealed in the public space. As a result, a solid assessment of the size of their population is practically impossible. As John Shindeldecker notes:

> You cannot count them according to what language they speak, because most of them speak Turkish as their mother tongue. You cannot count them according to where they live, because there are Alevis in almost all provinces of Turkey. Alevis have no distinguishing physical characteristics such as skin color, hair color or eye shape. They wear no traditional dress that sets them apart from anyone on the street. In fact, unless an Alevi tells someone he is an Alevi, it is difficult to discern. (Shindeldecker 1996: 4)

Population estimates vary widely: from 10 to 12 million at the lowest, to one-third of Turkey's population at the highest (Shindeldecker 1996; Shankland 2003; Kehl-Bodrogi 1992; Zeidan 1999). While census data do not tell us much about the sectarian divide, those gathered at the micro-individual level through academic surveys are much more informative. Çarkoğlu (2005) provides a first attempt at diagnosing Alevism in a nation-wide survey based on field research. Only about 3 percent of the respondents said they were Alevis when asked about their sectarian background. Such a low percentage is indicative of identity concealment among Alevis (Çarkoğlu and Kalaycığlu 2009). Two additional rounds of questions were asked about people's beliefs, in order to diagnose their sectarian background and to show that indirect methods function better in uncovering identity concealments. In the first round, a list of names of famous religious figures, including men of historical and theological significance for the Alevis, was

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[3] Notable exceptions to this peaceful coexistence of the Alevi and Sunni communities can be found in bloody clashes between the two communities in the late 1970s in Çorum and Kahramanmaraş. In early July 1993 an Alevi group called Pir Sultan Abdal Association sponsored a conference in Sivas. Sunni reactionists put fire to the hotel where the conference was being held; as a consequence 37 participants died from flames and smoke. (Doğan 2007; Sokefeld 2008; White and Jongerden 2003).

provided. Respondents were asked to point at the most important religious figures for them; twenty percent of the respondents picked the Alevi names. In the second round, the respondents were asked if they had pictures of religious leaders in their homes. This question was used as a distinguishing criterion, as only Alevis tend to display pictures of Caliph Ali and the twelve imams. Thirteen percent confirmed that they had the pictures of these Alevi leaders. These percentages indicate that Alevis constitute a larger proportion of the Turkish society than the 3 percent arrived at through direct questioning about sectarian identity. The survey findings show that it is practically impossible to obtain definite answers to direct questions regarding the sects of the respondents. A more indirect method, meanwhile, shows that approximately 15 percent of the respondents display some signs of Aleviness. These figures are overall national estimates, we do not have any breakdowns by provinces.

More useful is the recent publication by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy of a map of Turkey with estimates of the Alevi population by provinces.[4] When we use this map in conjunction with the 2008 population figures released from TUIK (Turkish Statistical Institute) on January 2009, we arrive at an Alevi population estimate for the whole country. According to this estimate, approximately half of the Alevi population has now moved to metropolitan areas; the other half still live in the provinces that were originally predominantly Alevi. As Alevis increasingly move into urban areas, the provinces are becoming more mixed. Such a long-term trend has the positive effect of easing the historical tensions between the two communities which now live side by side, especially in metropolitan settings. On the negative side, sectarian mixing renders the Alevi population more socially and politically disempowered. As a result of geographic dispersion, Alevis are now faced with challenges regarding political representation both on the national and the local level. Political mobilization is more arduous nowadays, when Alevis live in cities among large Sunni populations, than previously when they lived in rural communities.

### *Alevi Doctrine and Religious Practices*

A peculiar feature in the case of Alevis is that there is no generally accepted definition of Alevi identity.[5] Alevism is considered by some as a branch of

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[4]  See http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/mapImages/4616b6127d683.pdf.

[5]  The name Alevi derives from Arabic, and means "of Ali" or "pertaining to Ali". It thus links the Alevi tradition to the Prophet Muhammad's son-in-law and cousin Ali, who along

Islam that differs from other, more orthodox, orientations only in that it leaves wider room for various heterodox traditions and cultural elements; others, meanwhile, look upon Alevism not as a religious but rather as a cultural orientation. Even young immigrant Alevis in Istanbul are said to view Alevism as a 'life-style' rather than a religion (Seufert 1997: 172). Although Alevism share many common features with orthodox Islam, for example veneration of the Prophet Muhammad and emphasis on his family (most important of all, his son-in-law Ali), it has certain characteristics that differentiate it from both Sunni and Shia Islam, in particular the Shia Islam practiced at present in Iran. Although Shia Islam and Alevism look highly similar in their respect for the trinity of Allah-Muhammad-Ali and for the Twelve imams, they diverge significantly in religious practices. For instance, like Sunnis, Shia use mosques for worship; meanwhile, most Alevis do not attend mosques at all, but make use of *cem* houses, an exclusively Alevi feature. Shia also fast during Ramadan, again as Sunnis do, while Alevis have a different fasting period during which they recall the death of Hussein, the son of Caliph Ali, in Karbala.

The religious identity of Alevis can best be delineated in reference to the Sunni majority in Turkey. The oneness of God is commonly accepted by both groups, but Alevis tend to reject a vision of God as an "angry master who delights in forcing the slaves he has created to obey strict religious rules or face the penalty of burning for eternity" (Shindeldecker 1996: 4). Although they respect all major holy books and their prophets, and see the Quran as the last and most inclusive book that was 'let down from heaven', Alevis tend to interpret the Holy Quran more esoterically and mystically. Accordingly, they emphasize the understanding of the Holy Quran rather than its recitation, and call for the Quran to be read in Turkish. Besides the Quran, the most important sources of Alevi belief are the mystical poems and musical ballads (*deyişler, nefesler*) that largely remain part of an oral tradition rather than being recorded in writing. The Alevi practice of replacing the strict structure of 'orthodox religious teachings' with un-structured oral tradition is the main reason for other Muslims' skepticism as to the nature of Alevism's identity (Melikoff 1998; Erman and Gökar 2000; Koçan and Öncü 2004). There are also significant differences in beliefs and worship practices between the Sunni majority and Alevis. To cite just a few:

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with the Prophet is the central figure in the Shia tradition. Shindeldecker (1996) notes that the term *Alevi* fits a linguistic pattern in Turkish for the followers of Moses (Musa in Turkish or Musevi for Jews) and followers of Jesus (Isa in Turkish or Isevis). Turkey's Alevis should not be confused with the Alawi of Syria with whom they only share a veneration of Caliph Ali and little else. See Shindeldecker (1996), for different definitions regarding Alevis.

Alevis do not have a literal understanding of heaven or hell; divine judgment according to Alevi belief is not determined on the basis of religious worship or ritual participation but on inter-human behavior. Thus, not all Alevis necessarily observe ritual prayer (*namaz*), mosque attendance, fasting, pilgrimage and almsgiving (*zekat*).

A central Alevi communal worship practice is the *cem*, or *ayini cem*, which is held in an assembly house, a building or a room set apart for such meetings. These buildings have no distinctive signs, e.g. minarets, to distinguish them as worship places and there is no call to prayer corresponding to the Sunni *ezan*. A *cem* meeting is held by an elderly man or *dede* who, besides holding a spiritual and moral authority among Alevis, also has a claim of direct descent from the Prophet Muhammed through one of the twelve imams (*seyyitlik*). Traditionally, the *dede*s' authority used to extend over whole villages. It is not clear how this has changed nowadays, with Alevis being scattered throughout Turkish cities, or gathered in small groups in these cities. As the Alevi patterns of settlement underwent rapid change so have also their centers of authority. For instance, previously *dede*s had the authority to solve conflicts among Alevis, and they could expel people who were found guilty through communal trials. To what extent *dede*s still retain this power in modern urban settings is unclear (Rossum 2008).

The complex relationship between Alevis and the Turkish public in general is reflected in the political sphere as well. None of the major political factions have genuinely sought to advocate for the rights of Alevis throughout the multi-party Republican history, perhaps to avoid the risk of hurting or alienating the overwhelming Sunni majority of voters. Although they have never embraced any major political party as their sole representative on the political scene, Alevis have usually supported the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* or CHP). This support is widely interpreted as a reflection of Alevi support for the official ideology of Kemalism, usually attributed to their fear of an Islamic state (Kehl-Bodrogh 2003). The Islamist parties and their governments have always been looked upon by Alevis as the main threats to their survival in Turkey. This suspicion has been clearly evidenced since 2002, when the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* or AKP) came to power as a single-party government. Although no single party has emerged as the Alevis' political representative, the leftist parties have frequently drawn attention to their situation in Turkish society. Hence, any republican and secularist policy against Islamist politics has involved at least a brief reference to Alevi presence in Turkey and their rights.

*Alevism in Republican Turkey: A Brief Overview of Political Trends*

Social and political oppression and isolation of Alevis can be traced back to the sixteenth century confrontation between the Sunni Ottomans and the Sufi-Shia Safavids which resulted in an Ottoman victory that pushed the Safavids out of Anatolia into Iran. With their protectors exiled in Iran, the Alevis or *Kızılbaş*—Turkmen followers of the Safavid Sufi order—largely retreated into isolation in remote Anatolian rural lands. Since then, their isolation has been a key factor in the shaping of their peculiar doctrine and social structures noted above. Survival strategies were necessary within the dominant and hostile Sunni Anatolian communities. The use of *taqiyya* or religious concealment under danger, a practice central to Shiism,[6] importantly contributed to the survival of Alevism in this environment (Kuran 1995; Bozkurt 1998; Çamuroğlu 2000; Selçuk, Şaylan and Kalkan 1994; Shankland 2003). Given this historical background, it is no surprise that the Alevi minority faced continuous discrimination by the central authority. As a result, the ambitions of the Kemalist Republicans to replace the Ottoman Empire with a modern and secular state were embraced enthusiastically by Alevis. However, the end result of their support for the Republic did not really meet the Alevis' expectations.

The Kemalist Republic of 1923 relieved the Alevis from considerable legal pressures. Within a few years, the new Republic no longer had an official religion in its Constitution. The daily problems concerning religious practice in *cem* houses and the socio-economic discrimination they had faced within the Sunni communities may have remained largely unresolved; nonetheless the new secular Republic was the very basis of Alevi security. From the very beginning of the multi-party Republican regime, Alevi support for the secularist principles and their ardent opposition to Islamist Sunni electoral traditions have been visible and significant. This state of mind brought the Alevis closer to the Republican left-wing. "Alevis have been the main allies of secularist groups, organizations and political parties as they have a direct interest in resisting the rise of Sunni Islamic fundamentalist influence" (Koçan and Öncü 2004: 477). The right-wing parties in Turkey have long kept their distance from the Alevi communities. While this might be due to the parties' fear of losing Sunni conservative support, the foremost reason is more likely to be a lack of ideological congruence between the conservative right-wing political orientation in

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[6]  See Firro and Loüer in the present volume.

Turkey and the deeply progressive, egalitarian, and left-wing orientation among Alevis in the post-1960 era (Çakır 1998; Seufert 1997; Koçan and Öncü 2004; Göner 2005).

As Turkey plunged into an anarchic fight between opposing armed groups in the 1960s and 1970s, Alevis' left-wing orientation became increasingly apparent. The leftists of this period were more concerned with class struggle within a socialist or communist ideological framework than with secularism, Kemalist principles or identity issues, all matters that would dominate the public agenda in the 1990s. At a time when the new urban Alevi communities were going through social/political transition, the rising left-wing ideology did not seem to recognize Aleviness, or any cultural or religious distinctiveness of Alevis. Its rhetoric focused exclusively on economic class struggle.

> Instead of being concerned with their own tradition, the Alevi youth joined the left in political struggles prior to 1980 and sometimes even physically attacked Alevi holy men, the *dedes*, for being rural conservatives. Alevi political activism pushed religious and identity issues to the background. The Alevis tended to see themselves as part of the national and international working-class. (Seufert 1997: 164)

The nature of the ideological armed struggle meant that involvement was particularly pronounced among the Alevi youth. Together with the pressures caused by migration to the cities, this resulted in a weakening of the communal cohesion that existed under the control of its traditional authority figures such as the *dedes* and the elders. As the country was heading towards a military regime, the Alevi communities of the late 1970s seemed to have lost their distinct cultural and religious character and increasingly adopted a working class identity.

The military junta of 1980 put an end to all the political parties, and their leadership cadres were jailed and banned from politics. Not surprisingly, labor unions and left-wing youth organizations also took their share of the beating. The implications of such oppression upon the left, that had represented an ideological comfort zone for the newly urbanized Alevi communities, were quite significant. The mobilization push provided by the left-wing class struggle rhetoric and the socialist explanations that emphasized class identities and relations were now displaced by cultural and religious argumentations focusing on the teachings and rituals of the Alevi belief (Erman and Göker 2000). This new emphasis on Aleviness brought forward a glorification of Alevi identity. Alevism thus was seen as even more "just, egalitarian and libertarian than socialism" (Poyraz 2005: 505).

Three factors explain this revival of Alevi identity: urbanization, or what Shankland (2003) describes as the effectual emptying of the rural Alevi communities; the decline and collapse of the Soviet Union and the communist bloc; and the continual rise of the pro-Islamist movement in Turkey, ending with its capture of the executive office as a single party government in 2002. When this occurred, the Alevis, out of their own will, opted not for exit but for the second option put forward by Hirschman (1970), that is, voice. They felt the need to make their sectarian identity explicit and emphasize it so as to make both the state establishment and the government aware that Turkish society is not exclusively Sunni, and that the Alevis need protection in the face of rising Islamism in the country.

From the early 1950s onward, urban settlements have increasingly attracted peasant communities in search of a better life. Typically these migrant communities have settled on the outskirts of the cities and formed what came to be known as shanty towns or *gecekondu* (literally 'settled over night') neighborhoods. From the perspective of formation and maintenance of Alevi identity, urbanization posed new challenges. The most important challenge for the mainly working class shanty town dwellers was the reshaping of, and emphasis on, a distinctive Alevi identity that could counter pressures to blend into the urban setting. The left-wing socialist or class-based identities which were all-inclusive, and thus ignored Alevi cultural peculiarities, became increasingly unacceptable in the new era. Alevi self-identification, with its emphasis on culture and faith, was becoming more appealing. With urbanization came better opportunities for education and economic advancement. These paved the way for a new Alevi bourgeoisie (Çamuroğlu 1998: 79; Şimşek 2004: 129). The priorities of this new middle class did not necessarily overlap with those held by Alevis with a more modest socio-economic status. Rather than stressing the difficulties in Alevi living conditions and the economic hardships experienced, members of the bourgeoisie were more concerned with issues such as self-identification. The Alevi bourgeoisie exhibited a high degree of sectarian awareness, and had the progress of the Alevis as their sole aim.

The collapse of the communist bloc, on the other hand, rendered socialist ideology outdated, as it symbolized the defeat of socialism/communism by liberal democracy throughout the world. Everywhere, claiming devotion to this ideology and its practical application was no longer appreciated and respected, and Turkey was no exception. As a consequence, the meaning of the left-right dichotomy, that had dominated both social and political life in Turkey for several decades, was replaced by rising identity politics.

The military takeover in 1980 already put a temporary end to the conflict between the left and the right in Turkey. To be able to control the left, which is regarded by the state establishment as the more dangerous of the two sides involved in this conflict, the military itself used Islam and embraced a policy called Turkish-Islam synthesis; through this the State and its institutions allocated and promoted a particular place to Islam, with a clear Sunni flavor, in the Turkish public sphere. More specifically, the declared policy of the 1980 junta to build a mosque in each village that did not have one effectively brought Sunni imams with a state salary and an official Sunni world view into all the Alevi villages (Zeidan 1999; Şimşek 2004). The exploitation of religion for political purposes was not a new concept for Alevis who have felt themselves threatened by policies based on religion since the 1950s. Yet, the direct glorification of Islam by the State itself was viewed by Alevis as the most dangerous of all their experiences. Over time, they seem to have decided that making their Alevi identity explicit and putting emphasis on it rather than on other social or political ideologies would be to their benefit, as this will remind the State of the existence of non-Sunni Muslims in the country.

Although the Turkish-Islam synthesis was part of a latent state policy during the 1980 regime, the Turkish State was never comfortable with the rise of social and political Islam outside of its immediate control. It was nevertheless obvious that the state establishment was unable to fully control the Islamization process it originally encouraged, at the beginning of the 1980s, in its struggle against left-wing tendencies in Turkey. The attitude of the State with regard to Islam changed considerably in the 1990s. The state elite, fearing that Islamism would grow out of control, took defensive measures against the rising tide of Islamic activism. One of the preventive measures adopted in the 1990s was to use Alevis to counter-balance Islamism. Alevis were considered suitable for such a role, as they were well known for lending "support to democratic and tolerant ideals, while shying away from some of the more fundamentalist practices found in the Sunni religion" (Poyraz 2005: 506). The Alevi stance towards democracy and secularism, in general, was congruent with the defensive standpoint of the Turkish State and its elite against political Islam. This fact fostered the alliance between the state elite and Alevis, to prevent the latter from being overrun by the rising Islamist forces. "A more rigid secular discourse began to be disseminated by various state institutions" (Koçan and Öncü 2004: 478) when, in 1996 a pro-Islamist party, for the first time in Turkish political history, had the chance to rule the country through a coalition government. "The support of Alevis were even more vital after February

1997, when the Turkish State declared open war on radical Islam" (Poyraz 2005: 512) after the experience of a short-lived government by an Islamist party as one of the coalition partners.

Given the dichotomization and polarization between Alevi identity and Islamist politics, the relationship between the AKP and Alevis deserves particular attention. The AKP is the most recent extension of the National Outlook (*Milli Görüş*) Movement, the group that has established all of the major Islamist parties in Turkey since mid-1960s. All have eventually been closed down for being against the secular principles of the Republic, and most of their members were banned from politics for certain periods. Yet, a core elite group has repeatedly re-created these parties under different names, each and every time. The AKP elite cadres come from a relatively younger generation within this movement; they tried hard to distinguish themselves from the rest of the movement immediately after their breakup with the older generation leadership of Necmettin Erbakan and his followers. The young generation Islamists argued that they have a more liberal and a more democratic stance compared to members of the earlier Islamist parties. They even insisted that the AKP was not an Islamist party and that they could be considered only as conservative democrats (Hale and Özbudun 2010; Yavuz 2009; Turunç 2007).

Despite all these discussions and various self-identifications made by members of the AKP, the popular opinion has always regarded the party as an Islamist one; so have the Alevis. Hence, during the seven years between 2002 and 2009, when the Turkish political scene was dominated by AKP governments, Alevis in Turkey have felt themselves under threat. This feeling of being intimidated might not, however, be as high as it was under the preceding Welfare Party's (*Refah Partisi*-RP) coalition government with the True Path Party (*Doğru Yol Partisi*-DYP). One immediate reason is the aforementioned new liberal re-orientation of the younger generation Islamists. However; a number of political openings by the AKP aiming to appeal to Alevis have apparently failed, and Alevi uneasiness seems to continue.

## *Alevis and the AKP Government*

Two major factors explain this uneasiness between the AKP and Alevis. The first and perhaps more important is the ambiguous stance of the AKP leadership towards Alevi identity in Turkey. Admittedly, there have been some positive changes in the AKP's policies, such as the decision to

allocate a seat in the Turkish Grand National Assembly to the well-known Alevi historian and author, Reha Çamuroğlu, and to hold a couple of well-publicized meetings with the Alevi leaders. Most of the conciliatory steps taken by the AKP concern the month of Muharram and the incident of Karbala, when the son of Caliph Ali, Hussein, was killed. The discourse employed has always included signs of resentment about this happening. The Minister of Education of the AKP government lately described this event as a tragic memory in Islamic history (*Radikal* February 09, 2006). However, the prime minister, Tayyip Erdoğan's open denial of Alevis as a *suis generis* religious group to be reckoned with can be interpreted as a sign of the AKP's negative stance towards this group. To support his view, Mr. Erdoğan made a comparison between mosques and cem houses and called the former worshipping places, while the latter were spoken of as only culture houses (*Radikal* September 14, 2003). Many Alevis feel uncomfortable with such a definition for two reasons. First of all, even though members of the group are known for their secular outlook, they regard Alevism as their religion, rather than their culture; hence, the cem practices are for them part of a religious ceremony. Moreover, in Turkey, places of worship (whether churches, synagogues, or mosques) are exempt from paying fees for water and electricity. Therefore, having the cem buildings recognized as places of worship would help Alevis also in economic terms. Mr. Erdoğan's attitude is what Alevis in general expect from the leader of an Islamist party.

Within the course of the first government—between 2002 and 2007—formed by the AKP, the deputy chairman of the party claimed that failure to have an Alevi among their parliamentarians was a pity, and a result of the misrepresentation of the AKP as the party of the Sunnis. He even encouraged Alevi citizens of Turkey to enroll in the party and to become MPs through the seats of the AKP. His one and a half hour-long speech on an Alevi television channel, Cem TV, also attracted the attention of both the political sphere in general and his party's cadres in particular (*Radikal* January 12, 2007). The deputy chairman's declared aim was to include Alevi politicians among the party cadres as MPs. This aim was realized during the second government formed by the AKP in 2007, with three Alevi MPs taking seats in the parliament as members of the AKP. One of these MPs was a well-known figure among the Alevis, and his status as an AKP MP was widely discussed. He was severely criticized by many Alevis. The people who trusted him and believed that he would improve the social and political conditions of Alevis felt, however, highly disappointed by his statements. He said that his priorities do not include the problems of the Alevis, as

there were more important ones. This was interpreted as a perfect sign of his incompetence in this regard and even displayed the fact that he did not much care about satisfying the Alevis at all (*Radikal* July 26, 2007).

The second factor affecting the relationship between Alevis and the AKP has more to do with the inner dynamics and convictions of Alevis than with those of the AKP. Firstly, Alevis do not consider the AKP's conciliatory moves towards them sincere; they believe that all the steps taken towards Alevis are results of electoral calculations for winning elections. The Alevi elites seem to believe that, although the AKP was the winning party in the 2002 elections and had the chance to form the first single-party government in Turkey since 1991, the vote percentages showed that the party enjoyed the support of less than two thirds of the electorate. The AKP, according to Alevis, were aware of this fact and knew very well that Alevis were among the first groups it had to reach or neutralize for a long and peaceful survival in government. This reasoning explained every step the AKP took towards Alevis as an extension of the assimilationist process they pursued against this group (*Radikal* March 23, 2003).

Secondly, Alevis are an inherently heterogeneous group. While some seek the legal recognition of their belief system by the State, ask for government support for their cem houses, and hence react favorably towards the conciliatory moves of the AKP in these respects, others object to such a cooperative stance, and argue that the AKP never acts for the benefit of Alevis but instead has ulterior hidden motives.

In consequence, the relationship between Alevis and the AKP is still full of problems and could not have been smoothened, despite the advancements attempted by the AKP government during their more than seven years long tenure in executive office. Alevis seem to position themselves in opposition to Sunni fundamentalism in the political arena. They believe that they have to secure the permanence of secularism in Turkey, and to block any advance by fundamentalists. With these aims in mind, the main allies they have are secularist forces; yet they also want to ally with moderate Sunnis against fundamentalists. With respect to nationalism, on the other hand, Alevis perceive themselves as the real guardians of Turkish culture and religion. Defining Alevism as a combination of Islam and Turkish culture, Alevis label Sunnism as an Arab Islam. "Alevis view themselves as the true preservers of authentic Turkish culture, religion, and language amidst Ottoman pressures to Arabize or Persianize. In sum, the Turks are the real guardians of Islam, and the Alevis are the real Turks" (Zeidan 1999).

Despite their long-enduring leftist inclination, during the last couple of years, Alevis have begun to express anger at the CHP, the *à la Turca* left or self-declared social democratic party in Turkey, as it had been reluctant to answer their calls. For instance, the CHP has still not objected to the mandatory religious education courses, a legacy from the 1980 military regime. Nevertheless, these developments and the sour relations between Alevis and the CHP can hardly detach Alevi votes from the CHP, as Alevis believe they cannot embrace the conservative approaches of political Islam, due to the humanist nature of Alevism, and to its doctrine that equates all nations, cultures and identities (*Radikal* February 12, 2007).

### *Progress or Stagnation: Alevi Complaints and Demands*

Alevis' main complaint is that they are not recognized by the Turkish State. The state institutions, they claim, impose Sunni Islam on the population even though the Turkish Republic officially proclaims itself to be a secular state. The status of cem houses, the mandatory religion courses, and the limits they face in upward mobility in public employment constitute the crux of Alevi complaints and demands.

The Turkish Constitution recognizes freedom of religion, according to the International Religious Freedom Report of 2008, published by the US State Department.

> Alevis freely practiced their beliefs and have built cem houses, although these have no legal status as places of worship and are often referred to as "cultural centers".
>
> Representatives of Alevi organizations maintained that they often faced obstacles when attempting to establish *cem* houses. They said there were approximately 100 *cem* houses in the country, a number that they claimed was insufficient to meet their needs. (http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/130299.htm).

Alevis are considered to be a heterodox Muslim sect and are often referred to as 'heretics' or 'outcasts' by traditionalist Sunnis who view Alevi theology as 'wrong' and as a "threat to their way of life and an obstacle to their ideal of creating a pious society built around the Qur'an." (*The Independent* January 7, 2007)

A suspicious approach towards the Directorate of Religious Affairs (DRA)—a bureaucratic state institution that is blamed for favoring Sunni Islam at the expense of Alevis, and for its aim to assimilate Alevis into mainstream Sunni Islam—is a common feature of several Alevi groups.

However, the solutions offered in dealing with inequalities created by the DRA also form a basis for deep differences among Alevis. Some seek legal recognition of their belief system by the State and ask for government support for their cem houses; they argue that the government should provide electricity and water to cem houses as it does for mosques, churches and synagogues; hence, they react favorably to the recognition attempts of the State. Others blame the members of the first group for being adulators of the State and argue against a cooperative stance towards these new overtures of the State. The former group argues for the integration of Alevis into the DRA, whereas the latter supports the abolishment of the DRA altogether, as they believe that this institution creates a formal bias in favor of Sunni Islam in Turkey (Dressler 2008: 289–290). Indeed, what makes Alevis really nervous with respect to their relationship with the DRA is the fear that they might lose their independence from the State once they get involved with the DRA, which is by nature a state institution.

Compulsory religious education provided throughout all Turkish secondary education is another major point in the Alevi criticism of the established system. It deems these classes to be highly problematic for Alevis' religious freedom, and views them as a vehicle of assimilation by the State. "Critics claim that Turkish religious education, which has been compulsory since 1982, effectively tries to indoctrinate children to the state-sponsored approach to Islam" (Stewart 2007: 55). The State is believed to force Alevi students to learn the Sunni interpretation of Islam, and to ignore Alevi identity totally, while claiming to be talking about Islam in general. Meanwhile, the students belonging to the religious communities that are legally recognized as minorities in Turkey are exempted from this compulsory religious education.

As part of its policies towards religious communities, the Republican regime aimed to control and regulate Islamic movements through, among other means, the use of the DRA, which has always had a Sunni orientation and has thus kept the Alevis mostly outside the Republican administrative circles of influence. Thus, although Alevis provided the backbone of popular support for secularism, the very Republican policies aiming to regulate religion in the country resulted in an effective exclusion of Alevis from the State apparatus. These policies also turn a blind eye towards Alevi community rights. More than 4000 court cases against the Ministry of Education regarding this discrimination are reported in the 2008 International Religious Freedom Report (http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/130299.htm).

Alevis also complain about lack of upward mobility in the Turkish public sector. Most of the officeholders in the public sector change with each and every election, as each ruling party prefers to appoint its own supporters in these offices. Alevis believe that none of the parties ever cares about them when they make the appointments. "The complaint of the Alevis regarding political representation is about holding public office. The Alevi claim is that there are no Alevi governors in the 81 provinces in Turkey, and none of the 400 general managers in the public sector organizations are Alevis." (Özalay 2006: 18)

These historical animosities and the continuing Alevi complaints, that the Turkish State favors the Sunni community at their expense have resulted in a number of deep rooted individual reactions and attitudinal patterns among Alevis. Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu (2009) report individual level reflections of cultural and attitudinal differences which seem to distinguish Alevis from the rest of Turkish society, which is pre-dominantly of Sunni orientation. As noted above, such individual level analyses suffer from the difficulties of finding out who is an Alevi in the context of a nation-wide representative survey. Nevertheless, we observe that the pattern of attitudinal contrast between the Alevi minority and the Sunni majority in Turkey fits many of our expectations. For instance, Alevis appear less religiously conservative and more liberal in their religious attitudes. Especially focusing on anomic attitudes and political efficacy, we observe that the two major minority groups in Turkey, Kurds and Alevis, are not situated far from each other on average, but they are distinctly different from the average of Sunni Turks.[7] Comparing levels of anomie, we find that Kurds and uneducated individuals are about equal, while both have about average levels of political inefficacy. The average Alevi respondent, on the other hand, has a lower than average level of political inefficacy, and about the average anomie level for our sample. In other words, Alevis appear to feel more politically efficacious as well as being less anomic than Kurds, which implies that, in comparison to the latter, Alevis are more integrated into Turkish society.

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[7]   Feelings of efficacy and anomie have been chosen as being reflections of the empowerment and disempowerment of Alevis within the larger Turkish society in social and political arenas. Higher anomie would function as an indicator of Alevis' perception of powerless status in the Turkish society. Efficacy, on the other hand, is defined as the ability to actualize the intended social or political effect in the society. Inefficacy, hence, is also believed to be a character of powerless groups that do not have the necessary competence or opportunity to affect social and political outcomes. For more discussion on the conceptual merits and shortcomings of both anomie and political inefficacy as well as measurement details see (Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu, 2009).

Even in a multivariate setting where demographic and attitudinal control variables are included in our evaluations, Alevi respondents appear to be at a lower level of political inefficaciousness than the non-Alevi group. While Alevis are not different from the sample in general in terms of their feelings of anomie, in political efficacy they seem to rate higher than the average member of Turkish society, indicating that Alevis do not think that they are underrepresented in decision-making processes and in political outcomes. In some respects these findings may sound like a contradiction to our earlier arguments. However, as we already argued, Alevis are not strictly a powerless minority, for they use the center-periphery cleavage in Turkish society by siding with the center to maintain a certain level of efficacy in Turkish society. Thus, our observation concerning the higher level of political efficacy for Alevis as opposed to Kurds is very much in line with our preceding historical analysis. From a perspective of comparative evaluation, these empirical measures of anomie and political inefficacy offer informative opportunities. Obviously limited in scope and explanatory power, they are the only measures of the feelings and attitudes of Alevis as opposed to Kurds, who are the two largest Muslim minority groups in Turkey. One should be cautious about the limited diagnosis capability of these two simple measures. Yet, as an aggregation of attitudinal evaluations within a scale format, these are the only two measures with wide empirical data basis from the recent Turkish social experiences.

*Conclusions*

Several conclusions can be drawn from our analyses above. The first one is about the historical evolution of Alevism in modern Turkey. The Alevis' role in defining the scope and limits of the Turkish State as it relates to the overwhelmingly Muslim Turkish society has always been critical in modern history. Recently, Alevis seem to have become important actors in the resistance to the rise of pro-Islamist forces in Turkish politics and in the protection of secularist principles. There has also been a clear emphasis upon a new Alevi identity.

As there are no easy ways to identify Alevi respondents in an empirical setting, it is difficult to carry out studies based on representative samples and draw general inferences about this group. Given these difficulties and the resulting limitations of our empirical data about Alevis, we can none-theless observe that most Alevi respondents in empirical settings appear to be better educated and to have a higher socio-economic status than the

rest of our nation-wide representative samples. As a result, Alevis appear to feel politically more efficacious than the rest of the predominantly Sunni Muslim samples. Alevis political alliances also appear to be increasingly complex due to the changes which have taken place with the rise of pro-Islamist electoral forces. We should also note that migration to the cities creates a *de facto* situation in which Alevis are increasingly surrounded by conservative urban Sunni majorities. While this situation may lead to a weakening of their potential for political mobilization, hence their political representation, it may also result in aligning them behind some of the right-wing parties.

Despite concerted efforts by the AKP government since its coming to power in 2002, Alevis' demands remain largely unresolved and their expectations unfulfilled. This leaves them in search of new allies in the political arena, since the traditional ones seem to have abandoned the Alevi cause. In the immediate future the Alevi minority will most likely concentrate its efforts on demanding the recognition of their distinct sectarian identity, and on searching for new political representatives in the political scene who are ready to defend the Alevis' social and political rights. Both efforts aim to further the group's empowerment within Turkish society.

Alevis' relations with the ruling Islamist conservative AKP government are likely to exert an enduring influence on the way their role within the Turkish polity is redefined. As they moved into urban settlements over the past few decades, Alevis have effectively disconnected themselves from the traditional left-wing ideological and political agenda and adopted a series of demands in the realm of identity politics. They are now in a better position to enter into effective social and political alliances. The AKP's overtures to the Alevis, for example, are not only aimed at broadening the party's electoral support base; rather, they are meant to legitimize the AKP's own identity claims based on conservative Islamist ideology. However, the skepticism with which Alevis view these AKP advances is evidence of the enduring difficulties on both sides. Alevi demands come at a time when this minority is widely spread in urban areas that are predominantly Sunni and where Alevi communal identity is on the rise. It is not easy to reach simple conclusions about their empowerment and disempowerment as of the early decades of the twenty- first century. Segregation between the Alevi minority and the Sunni majority has decreased significantly, but the fact that the majority has become increasingly more religiously conservative has not contributed to making it easier for Alevis to express their sectarian identity. Nevertheless, as a result of Turkey's quest for membership in the EU together with the rise in identity politics among ethnic and religious

groups, there are signs that Alevis today enjoy greater recognition as a distinct group with distinct identity demands.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

## NATIONALISM AND RELIGION IN CONTEMPORARY IRAN

### Eliz Sanasarian

In discussions of social and political dynamics involving the state and society, themes such as religious and ethnic groups, minority and majority, identity and modernization have been used with frequency. Some of these themes have been interchangeable, and in different time periods the focus of studies has shifted. Prior to the 1990s nationalism and nation-building, debates on modernization, communication, integration, and the role of ethnic groups and conflict were dominant. By the late 1990s 'identity' had become a new focus, often mixed with a psychological approach. This was "a 'neo-way' of addressing identity, and this new tool preordained the questions that would be asked and the answers that would be given. Not explained were the trajectory, ideology, successes, and failures of modern nationalist movements" (Newman 2000: 23).[1] Mark Juergensmeyer, reflecting on world events in the 1990s, used the term 'religious nationalism' as a way of describing "longing for an indigenous form of religious politics free from the taint of Western culture". This "new cold war" was based on the "resurgence of parochial identities based on ethnic and religious allegiances" (Juergensmeyer 1993: 1–2). As old models had failed, the new ones were here to challenge Western secular nationalism.

World events, in many ways, seemed to be supporting parts, if not all, of Juergensmeyer's worldview. Yet, as we approached the end of the 1990s, with the spread of internet and intensification of globalization, something was changing. These shifts were throwing all discussions, theories, and arguments out of order. Transformations were at both macro and micro levels driven by the information technology.[2] Here, for example, the active role of diasporic communities and human rights organizations had intensified

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[1] This is a study of the evolution of the concept of nationalism. I have discussed the ethnicity literature and its relevance, or lack of, to Iran in Sanasarian 2000: 1–8.

[2] This point is cleverly portrayed in the journalistic work first published in 1999 by Thomas L. Friedman 2000.

with an impact (not yet clearly measurable) on the behavior of societies and states.

This transformation has not yet been able to shed light on one very important issue, namely power politics. This dilemma was expressed by John Breuilly: "To focus upon culture, ideology, identity, class or modernization is to neglect the fundamental point that nationalism is, above and beyond all else, about politics and politics is about power. The central task is to relate nationalism to the objectives of obtaining and using state power" (Breuilly 1993:1). The significance of Breuilly's comment is that ultimately power is where the interests lie; therefore, the interests can change depending on the situation.

This study places power and powerlessness in the components of nationalism (identity, ethnicity, and religion). It argues that the reason politics is lost is because it is extremely challenging to pinpoint its dynamics. Politics and power are not displayed openly, particularly in countries like Iran, making it almost impossible to assess details. When one engages specifically with empirical evidence to find 'politics', still mysteries remain. Lack of institutional framework contributes to the complexity; the polity is secretive, multilayered, and personal. The Islamic State with its clergy have become more complicated than the monarchist regime of the past, and James Bill's comment rings true even more today than ever before: namely that the "processes of power and decisionmaking are usually hidden within the deepest recesses of society, where they exist in a state of constant flux" (Bill 1988: 10). Ultimately, it is almost impossible to assess correctly and clearly both "the shadowy corridors of the political system" (Bill 1988: 10), and the shadowy activities of members of religious minority communities as they act, react, respond, resist, compromise, defend, inform the authorities, betray their own communities, or other minority groups.

This chapter identifies religious minorities in Iran and their present condition, discusses the legal ramifications of their situation, assesses their responses, and concludes by reverting back to the issue of nationalism.

## Religious Composition

Iran is a heterogeneous society. Group characteristics and geographical settings have led to a society where primordial ties are strong. The overwhelming majority of the population are Shi'i, about nine percent are Sunni, and the rest are Baha'i, Christian, Jewish, Zoroastrian, and a very small and little-known group are Mandeans. Muslim groups' main identification is

along ethnic or tribal lines: Arab (Shi'i and Sunni), Azeri (Shi'i), Bakhtiari (Shi'i), Baluch (Sunni), Kurd (some Shi'i, mostly Sunni), Lur (Shi'i), Qashqai (Shi'i), Shahsevan (Shi'i), and Turkmen (Sunni).[3]

*The Sunni Population*

The majority of the Sunni population resides in the Kurdestan, Sistan, and Baluchestan areas. To address Sunnis as one whole group is erroneous; they are divided regionally and ethnically, and there has rarely been close cooperation among these groups. Sunnism as a minority religion becomes an issue only in one grand context: namely proclaiming Iran a Twelver Shi'i State. This was a contentious issue from the beginning, clearly reflected in the debates over devising the Constitution in 1980. During the discussions in the Assembly of Experts, Sunni deputies were uneasy about the Shi'i domination and made several suggestions for change, to no avail. However, even during these debates ethnic identities were overriding Sunnism, as regional sensibilities were voiced. Representatives from large non-Persian speaking regions/provinces showed discontent with the center's institutional domination of policy, and this concern crossed over even to those from some Shi'i ethnic communities (Sanasarian 2000: 62–3).[4] Therefore, the dynamic of regionalism (provincial needs and priorities) were of utmost importance even in 1979–1980. During debates, some Sunni ethnic deputies showed deep discontent with official recognition of Zoroastrians, Jews and Christians in the Islamic Constitution. "How is it that we officially recognize the religions of Israel and the United States who are our formal enemies and their religions are obsolete, . . . but we do not accept Sunnism?" demanded a deputy from Baluchestan.[5]

Since the establishment of the Shi'i Islamic Republic, the Sunni population has voiced discontent in different areas. A myriad of problems were reported in recent times. Sunni Majlis deputies have complained about discrimination in appointments at the executive and judicial branches and in government-appointed positions in Sunni dominated provinces. Disallowing the teaching of Sunni religious literature in public schools in

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[3] Precise numbers are hard to come by because the Iranian official census does not include ethnic categories. *The CIA World Factbook* (February 2007) identifies Persian (51%), Azeri (24%), Kurd (7%), Arab (3%), Lur (2%), Baluch (2%), Turkmen (2%).

[4] Analysis of the entire debates, based on the documents of the proceedings of the Assembly, appear in Sanasarian 2000: 58–72.

[5] *Surat-e Mashruh-e Mozakerat-e Majilis-e Barrasi-ye Nahaiye Qanun-e Asasiye Jomhuri-ye Islami-ye Iran*, 8th session, 31 Mordad 1358 [22 August 1979], p. 184.

Sunni dominated regions has been another long time complaint (International Religious Freedom Report 2008: 4). The Arab minority in the south has protested and clashed with government security forces over plans for forcible relocation under the guise of an agricultural-business project (Jane's Intelligence Digest and Human Rights Watch). There have also been reports of clashes between government forces and the Baluchis as well as the Kurds, including arrest of some due to their involvement with online writings against the regime (Amnesty International 2009: 3–4 on the Baluch and the Kurds).

In a February 2009 report, Amnesty International, identified a host of charges which are used to target members of religious and ethnic minorities: "acting against state security", "spreading lies", "propaganda against the system", "creating unease in the public mind", "insulting the holy sanctities", and "defamation of state officials" (Amnesty International 2009: 1).

The root causes of disturbances involving the Sunni population are a mix of their religious minority status with ethnicity, sectarianism, regional disparity, and cross-border problems. These factors make the Sunni case much more complicated, going beyond mere religious discrimination. Recent reports indicate disturbances are caused by a high unemployment rate among the youth, perpetual poverty (including in the oil-rich southern Khuzestan province where much of the Sunni Arab population is concentrated), an inferior educational system, and the lawless borderlands (such as the organized drug-smuggling networks along the Baluchestan route or the open frontiers of the Kurdish borders). Despite all these critical problems, the only group which still demonstrates a high likelihood for secession are the Kurds. However, anything involving Sunni borderline ethnic groups is impossible to discern with clarity; this is partially due to the divisions within these groups, both their and the Iranian government's disinformation campaigns, as well as legitimate state security concerns.

*The Non-Muslim Population*

The Islamic government officially recognizes Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians. Christians are politically represented in parliament by ethnic groups, therefore, Armenians have two deputies (representing the northern and southern populations), and Assyrians and Chaldeans combined have one deputy. Jews and Zoroastrians each have one deputy. This type of political representation is an exact replica of what existed during the monarchy.

For the purposes of this chapter, the references to the Christian population are divided into two segments: the ethnic Christians, made up of

Armenians, Assyrians, and Chaldeans; and the Iranian Christians, Muslim converts to Christianity, mainly of the Protestant denomination.

Armenians, Assyrians, and Chaldeans have lived in Iran for centuries; their histories are closely intertwined with developments of the Persian State and society. The cultural links between Persians and Armenians can be traced back to the Zoroastrian era. For twelve centuries, Armenia was under the direct or indirect rule of the Persians. Later, Armenian Christianity retained some Zoroastrian vocabulary and ritual. Reports indicate that there were Zoroastrian Armenians in Armenia until the 1920s. Persians and Armenians claim to be of Indo-European origin. The bulk of the Armenian population was forcefully transported (within the same empire) from their ancestral lands during the early seventeenth century for military and economic reasons (Sanasarian 2000: 34–40). The majority of the Armenians belong to the Armenian Apostolic Church, an ancient orthodox and autocephalous branch of eastern Christianity that became the church of the original Armenian State in 314 AD. There are also small numbers of Catholic and Protestant Armenians in Iran.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to summarize the evolution of the Assyrians and Chaldeans in Iran and the modern Middle East. This is related to the convoluted and complex history of their social and political developments as well as the role of missionaries in the region. Suffice it here to say that, in general, the Nestorians in their various reincarnations are referred to as the modern Assyrians. The bulk of the Chaldeans are Catholic, and they traditionally reside in the Khuzestan province. Their patriarchal seat is in Baghdad (Sanasarian 2000: 40–44). Starting around 2006, there has been a movement led by the Holy See in Vatican to encourage unity between the various Catholic Eastern Christian churches, particularly between Chaldeans and Assyrians.[6]

The decline in the numbers of ethnic Christian groups in Iran has been dramatic. The Armenian population declined from 250,000 in the mid-1970s to 150,000 in the mid-1990s. One source places them at 90,000 today. The number of Assyrians and Chaldeans declined from 30,000 in the mid-1970s to between 16–18,000 in the mid-1990s; today their numbers are negligible (Sanasarian 2000: 36–7).[7]

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[6] www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/docum. The author thanks Mr. Sina Mossayeb for this information.

[7] See Table 2. For a summary of the 1996 official census, see, United States Department of State, the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2005. Also see *Iran Daily*, 21 December 2005.

Iranian Christians are Muslim converts, mainly to Protestant faiths, who have never had political representation in Parliament. They refer to themselves as 'Christians' and mix and socialize with ethnic Christians of Protestant beliefs who retain their ethnic identity. In other words, Protestant Armenians see themselves as Armenians and socialize with the Apostolics as well as Muslim converts. Even in the pre-Islamic government era, during the Pahlavi regime, these Churches were watched closely by the government. Acts of vigilantism against these churches were common, and they did not feel protected by the State (Tafti 1364: 44–6). Much persecution has befallen this group of Christians, ironically including Armenian Protestants, though they are not converts from Islam. Due to their missionary nature and their zeal to spread Christianity among Muslims, all Protestant groups have been suspect. According to the Iranian Christians, their numbers were around two to three thousand in 1977. By the end of 2007, their numbers had increased to over 250,000, some one thousand fold increase (Mojdeh 2007: 1; *U.S. News & World Report*). These numbers, however, cannot be substantiated. The Islamic Republic's official national census of 2006 states the total number of Christians in the country (including ethnic Armenians, Assyrians, and Chaldeans) is a mere 109,500.[8]

The Jewish presence in Iran predates the Christians. At least since the conquest of the Babylonian Empire by Cyrus the Great in 539 BC, Jews with a distinctive identity lived in the region. There were also many Jewish sectarian and even messianic movements in Persia. Jews wrote classical Persian in Hebrew letters (known as Judeo-Persian), and their prose and poetry reflected a synthesis of the two cultures. The Jews have faced many problems in post-1500 Persia, with the founding of the Safavid Dynasty which made Shi'ism the official state religion. These problems continued through the nineteenth-century.[9] The Pahlavi era was most congenial to the Jewish population. Jewish synagogues, organizations, and associations operated freely, and their economic and educational status improved dramatically. In post-1979, the decline in the number of Jews has been substantial. They numbered 75–80,0000 in the 1970s and 20–30,000 in the 1990s (Sanasarian 2000: 48). The latest national census placed them at around 9,250 (Paivandi 2008: 41, note 21).

Zoroastrianism was the state religion of three pre-Islamic Persian empires, and Zoroastrian communities continued to live in the country

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[8]  Iran Statistical Center, 2007 cited in note #20 in Paivandi 2008: 41.
[9]  For a detailed study of this period, see Tsadik 2007.

after the Islamic take over. They experienced oppression and conversion, but they also participated in various important national events in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Zoroastrians acquired special importance during the time of the monarchy, which used a lot of pre-Islamic Zoroastrian symbols to design and enrich its modern nationalism. Before 1979, their numbers were reported to be 30,000; in the mid-1990s at 50,000, and today the official statistics reports them as having 19,800 adherents in Iran (Sanasarian 2000: 48–50, Paivandi 2008: 41, note 19). Due to the association of Zoroastrianism with the pre-Islamic Persian past, members of the disenchanted population tend to declare themselves to be adherents of Zoroastrianism; therefore, although there are generationally solid Zoroastrians in Iran, there is also a fluid identity among non-formal Zoroastrians of Muslim Shi'i background. This is evident in a number of cultural practices such as the celebration of the first day of spring as Persian New Year.

The Baha'i case has been distinct from other non-Muslim communities. First, it rose in the nineteenth-century from amongst Shi'i Muslims as a post-Islamic religion, violating the belief among Muslims that Prophet Muhammad was the last of the prophets [Seal of Prophets]. Second, it got entangled with political and historical developments of the time in the region. While there were always conspirational rumors about non-Muslims, other factors intensified the Baha'i existence. They "did not belong to any particular ethnic group; they spoke the same language, and could not be identified by their names or specific geographic location" (Sanasarian 2008: 163). In addition, they were welcoming converts, therefore easily becoming "the enemy within" (ibid.). During the Pahlavi reign, Islamic groups continued their harassment of Baha'is; however, due to the general atmosphere of modernization, secularization, and education, many Baha'is, like other non-Muslims, prospered in Iran. The statistical numbers for Baha'is are difficult to ascertain; their numbers were generally reported at 300,000 during the mid- to late 1970s. For today, that number is not reliable but is still being used (Sanasarian 2000: 53).

Not much is known about the Mandeans who reside in Khuzestan province. Sometimes referred to as Sabians, they seem to trace their religious beliefs to John the Baptist. They are not officially recognized as a religious minority and have claimed much discrimination. Research indicates that the name Sabi'a appears several times in the Quran and mostly in favorable references. Yet, this one name appears to be referring to two separate groups. There seems to have been consistent confusion about their identity from the beginning. According to Yohanan Friedmann "The great number

and variety of definitions which can be found in the literature of hadith, fiqh and tafsir stem from the fact that the Muslim traditionalists had no firm knowledge of Sabiun [plural]. They were obliged, nevertheless, to deal with them in order to explain the relevant references in the Quran" (Friedman 2003: 82; notes 146 and 147).

### The Legal and Social Situation

Due to the dramatic reduction of non-Muslims in Iran, any discussion of their legal and social status seems pointless. After a very rich and dynamic history in medieval and early modern Iran, old Jewish and ethnic Christian communities are fast disappearing (Khanbaghi 2006).

In the past thirty years of theocracy, legally not much has changed. Recognized non-Muslims are second class citizens and non-recognized Baha'is, Iranian Christian converts, and Sabians are simply non-citizens. Baha'is and Iranian Christians live constantly under the threat of apostasy, the penalty of which is death.

The issue of apostasy in Islam has been discussed by others with special attention to complex religious texts, special cases, and historical developments (Friedman 2003: Chapter 4); it remains outside the scope of this article. In the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran, apostasy has been used in three ways: against Muslims who have converted to Christianity, against Baha'is for their post-Islamic religion (violating the belief that Prophet Mohammad was the seal of prophets), and against all those who are accused of insulting the Prophet and the Shi'i Imams.

The worst of all legislation (which curiously still remains in the books) is regarding inheritance. Although each officially recognized religious minority determines inheritance according to its own community's religious rules, another law takes precedence. If there is a Muslim in the family (or if one member of the family converts to Islam), he inherits the entire estate. Non-Muslim relatives cannot inherit from a Muslim. This is a repeat of the "Law of Apostasy" which was in effect during the Safavid Dynasty several centuries ago (Sanasarian 2000: 131). It was elaborated in the written works of Shi'i religious figures before the 1979 revolution and afterwards became the law of the land.

The penal code treats Muslims and non-Muslims differently, extending it to include gender and sexual orientation. For example, the penalty for a non-Muslim male who engages in a sexual relationship with a Muslim woman is death; for the Muslim male, it is one hundred lashes (Sanasarian

2000: 131–32). The intensity and depth of Muslim/non-Muslim differentiation is most evident in legislation dealing with homosexuality. The law distinguishes between active (*fael*) and passive (*maful*) partners. In the case of sexual intercourse, if both are Muslim, their penalty is death. If, however, the intercourse has not taken place, both receive one hundred lashes. The picture changes, however, if the active partner is a non-Muslim and the passive partner is a Muslim; then, the non-Muslim is subject to death (instead of lashes).

Several points are significant in this distinction:

(1) the hierarchical placing of the value of life between Muslim and a non-Muslim;
(2) the harsher treatment of the non-Muslim; and
(3) the designation of active or passive partner, which has two implications—the non-Muslim can easily be identified as active either by the Muslim partner or the Islamic judge and put to death, and the connotation that even in the realm of homosexual intercourse the non-Muslim will not be allowed to act as the active (which implied aggressive) partner in contact with the Muslim (Sanasarian 2000: 132–3).

For three decades, the legal value placed on the officially recognized religious minorities has been based on the following: a Muslim male is supreme; a recognized non-Muslim male is worth half of a Muslim male; a recognized non-Muslim female is worth half of her male co-religionist, making her worth one-fourth of the Muslim male. This was pertinent to the disbursement of blood price in criminal cases. After a lot of behind the scene maneuvering, by direct orders of the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamanei the blood price between Muslims and officially recognized non-Muslims was made equal. In other words, the blood money paid by a perpetrator for killing or wounding a Jew, a Zoroastrian, and an officially recognized Christian is the same as for the killing or wounding of a Muslim. In all other areas of law, the superiority of Muslims over non-Muslims has been preserved (Sanasarian and Davidi 2007: 63–6). If crimes were committed against Bahaʾis and Iranian-Christian converts, either the perpetrator went free or paid compensation to the judge, the court, or the government.

Law is important, as it institutionalizes behavior and practice. It also impacts on social interactions, and unjust laws embolden the bullies and spread fear. For example, in a recent case, an ethnic Christian mechanic asked to be paid after repairing the car of a Muslim customer. The customer refused to pay, and when the mechanic complained, the customer threatened

to report him to the authorities as having insulted Prophet Muhammad. Fearing the consequences, the mechanic backed off in despair.[10]

The impact of words as a force for unleashing untruths and violence has been discussed elsewhere (Sanasarian 2008: 159). While the legal system is discriminatory, the leadership of the regime emboldens individuals to do as they wish, and even the officially recognized religious minorities have no recourse. The situation is magnified for the non-recognized religious minorities. Attacks against Iranian Christians and their arrest and imprisonment in different parts of the country have been an ongoing process.[11] From late 2007, over a dozen cases of arson attacks against the Baha'is were reported throughout the country. This intensification of anti-Baha'ism was brushed aside by the press attaché for the Iranian delegation at the United Nations in New York by saying "They are full of claims, not verified by anybody." Yet, the Director of Human Rights Watch for the Middle East described the events as "a natural outcome of the government's most recent campaign to vilify and attack the Bahai community, disparaging them and their beliefs in the press with a spate of anti-Bahai articles in the government-run press"[12] The widespread attacks and their intensity led to a number of unusual moves inside the country such as: a fatwa in support of the Baha'is by Ayatollah Montazeri, who had been an avid anti-Baha'i in the past; Nobel laureate attorney, Shirin Ebadi, accepting the defense of the seven arrested leaders of the Baha'i community; and signatures of a few individuals inside Iran on a declaration stating how ashamed they were of the treatment of Baha'is in Iran. These were all major unprecedented events.[13]

### Reaction to Discrimination and Injustice

As the last case demonstrates, the harsh, persistent, and particular escalation of the persecution of Baha'is has ignited the most intense reaction internationally. An assessment of the actions of the regime and the reactions of international bodies has been presented in another work showing that the Khatami administration and its proponents were more likely to try to

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[10] The story was conveyed to the author by a close relative of the mechanic in question. The encounter was in 2009.

[11] www.TelevisionWashington.com, 26 Day 1388 [16 January 2010].

[12] "Iran: Religious minority reports arson attacks", http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/meast/07/29/iran.arson/index.html?eref=rss_world.

[13] See, http://www.we-are-ashamed.com.

appease the international community than is Ahmadinejad's administration (Sanasarian and Davidi 2007: 61–3).

From amongst recognized non-Muslims, Jews have been targeted by the Ahmadinejad administration. As before, the Jewish leadership has been extremely accommodating and supportive of the regime. For thirty years, the Iranian Jews have emphasized their separation from Israel and Zionism, reiterating their loyalty to the Islamic State. Attacks on synagogues and the negative portrayal of Jews in the media do not provoke a negative response from the existent Jewish community. However, in a striking departure in 2006, the Jewish deputy in parliament reacted to the denial of the Holocaust: "It's very regrettable to see a horrible tragedy so far reaching as the Holocaust being denied . . . it was a very big insult to Jews all around the world"; he also condemned the exhibition of cartoons about the Holocaust organized by an Iranian newspaper owned by the Tehran municipality.[14] While the protests against the denial of the Holocaust were impressive, no change was forthcoming. The anti-Jewish, anti-Zionist, and anti-Israel messages continue to be intertwined. They have been uttered with such frequency that whether the Jewish community reacts positively or negatively at this stage would not matter at all.

A year after the public reaction of the Jewish deputy, Hashemi Rafsanjani (generally known as a 'moderate' and rarely in the Ahmadinejad camp), chairman of the Expediency Council, during the Friday sermon on "International Jerusalem Day" said that

> Europe resolved a great problem . . . What Hitler and the German Nazis did to the Jews of Europe at that time was partly due to the circumstances with the Jews. They wanted to expel the Zionists from Europe because they always were a pain in the neck for the governments there . . . The first goal was to save Europe from the evil of Zionism, and in this, they have been relatively successful.[15]

In December 2008 in a pre-agenda speech to the Majilis, with President Ahmadinejad present, the Jewish deputy condemned Israel's invasion of Gaza calling it "the barbarous behavior of the occupying regime" and "crimes of the Zionist regime". Afterwards, the Jewish deputy left the podium and shook hands with the President kissing him on the cheek,

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[14] "Iran's proud but discreet Jews," 22 September 2006. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/5367892.stm

[15] The speech aired on Channel 1, Iranian TV, 5 October 2007, translated by The Middle East Media Research Institute. http://www.memritv.org/clip_transcript/en/1575.htm.

while some members of the Jewish community carried a protest against the State of Israel in front of the United Nations office in Tehran.[16]

Conformity and acceptance have long been a characteristic response from recognized religious minorities. They have shown an impressive resilience and an instinctive activation of historically ingrained survival techniques. Expressions of loyalty to the regime, any regime, have been common. In the face of discrimination, the protests have been measured. During the early years of the founding of the Islamic regime, some actions were overt, such as the stand-off between the Armenian community and the authorities over education and the teaching of the Armenian language. This was a right which the Armenians had enjoyed (with occasional disruption) for centuries; it was inconceivable that it would be taken away (Sanasarian 1995: 247–52). A host of issues attacked the sensitivities of the minority communities at different periods: confiscation of their schools (for whatever reason), headcover for Zoroastrian and ethnic Christian women, harassment of community members, and teaching minority religions with a text written by unknown Muslims.

"Recognized religious minorities adjusted but also resisted, they bent but stood firm, they educated but realigned themselves with the new circumstances. Each group resorted to its own shrewd traditional pattern of subterfuge, reconciliation, negotiation, and show of obedience to deal with the regime" (Sanasarian 2000: 155). Some acts of resistance did pay off, but most did not; those who had power were arrogant and ideologically equipped with a sense of righteous superiority, characteristics which finally turned them against each other with venomous force.

Thirty years have revealed another form of response from religious minorities, a response which was not so readily available to them earlier. While there had been occasional groups of minorities leaving for the West, Israel, Armenia, Australia and so forth, the twenty first century provided a much easier exit strategy. Mass out-migration from the country (and for Christians, from the Islamic Middle East) is the ultimate response. It makes a statement that these minorities do not want to suffer persecution, lack of political and economic opportunities, inferior legal status, confined segregated existence, adjustment, or compromise. Only one generation earlier, it was a novelty to leave; now it is the norm. When aspirations are not fulfilled and opportunities for exit exist, there is no reason to stay

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[16] WashingtonTV, 30 December 2009. http://televisionwashington.com/media1.apsx?lang=en&id=727

and suffer, manage, conform, and accommodate. This is particularly relevant to the younger generation of the minority (and also the majority) populations. In other words, the nature of response is changing and it is changing fast.

## *Nationalism, Religion and Identity*

The concern over discrimination against minorities thirty years ago was actualized not only through laws but also through school textbooks. Textbooks were the means of repression and identity formation. An extensive study of 95 compulsory school textbooks published in the school years 2006–2007 reveals the systematic cultivation of a desired identity by the State. The textbooks used in the study covered the sciences, humanities, and religious subjects from grades one to eleven; both statistical and qualitative analysis of image and content were used.

The study's conclusions are that the Sunni-Shi'i differences are played down but remain intact. While the emphasis is on unity, "all historical, social, and religious issues are interpreted from the stance of Shi'ite beliefs and traditions". Here the unity "must come from the government and take place based on the superiority of Shi'ism and its beliefs and traditions" (Paivandi 2008: 40; 41). References to "we Muslims" abound, but "the Shi'ites' quest for superiority is a main feature of the Iranian curriculum. This structural approach causes even the discourse on the equality of followers of all religions and ethnic groups to remain only a claim and to be negated in practice" (Paivandi 2008: 73). While there are some nationalist trends in textbooks, what dominates is "Shi'ite-egocentrism, ideological view of the world, and fear of growth of ethnic movements. In addition, the national and Islamic identities are all-encompassing and there is little room for other forms of identity" (Paivandi 2008: 47).

The textbook study also reveals the overall ethos of the Iranian theocracy. It shows that the Islamic Republic is portrayed as a sacred regime, the result of God's will and immune from criticism. Finally the textbooks perpetuate a dichotomy between the "self" and the "other", for instance between Iran and its enemies, between the godly and the infidel, or between the truly pious and the *monafegh* (hypocrite), and this dichotomy fuels antagonism toward groups or individuals who are different (Paivandi 2008: 4).

As the 2009 post-election demonstrations unraveled and flare ups continued in the following months, the reaction of the authorities was an indicator of a worldview discerned in the above study of textbooks. The

Minister of Information, in a speech to state governors in December 2009, said that the purpose of the demonstrations was to change the regime. He identified the following elements to be responsible for the chaos: "Hypocrites [opposite of pious], the monarchists, religious and ethnic terrorists, Bahaʾis, homosexuals, feminist groups and those who favor equal rights of women and men, nationalists and Marxists".[17]

By January 2010, the official Keyhan newspaper called the attorney Shirin Ebadi a Bahaʾi and asserted that supporters of Mr. Mussavi (the main contender against President-elect Ahmadinejad) are Bahaʾis and terrorists. The article engaged an old diatribe about Bahaʾis penetrating the monarchist regime and being responsible for recent events.[18] Several days before, the state-owned television of the Islamic Republic broadcast an interview with "an expert" who accused the female advisor of the other failed contender of the June presidential elections, Ayatollah Mehdi Karrubi, of being a supporter of the Bahaʾis. Karrubi, former Speaker of the Majlis [parliament], was called a "pseudo-cleric".[19]

Thirty years ago neither Mr. Karrubi nor Mr. Mussavi would have envisioned a day when they would be closely associated with the Bahaʾis. Yet, a system which is built on a constant perpetuation of 'self' and 'the other' always gives birth to new 'others' from old 'selves'; and finally turns against itself as the list of enemies multiply and power struggles intensify. The State's response to the events following the June 2009 elections shows that 'nationalism' and 'nationalists', whoever they may be these days, have become culprits along with other undesirables. The response demonstrates the State's ideological view of the world, built-in dichotomies, and the resurfacing of deeply entrenched long-time-in-the-making power struggles within the regime.

The relationship between nationalism and religion has been odd throughout the modern history of the country. During the Pahlavi monarchy, while Shiʿism was not cast aside, the Zoroastrian components and symbols were used in order to connect modern Iran to an ancient pre-Islamic and pre-Arab-dominated past. The term used in this era was Persian nationalism. The overthrow of the monarchy was also the fall of the Zoroastrian components of nationalism by the religious-dominated State and its total replacement by Twelver Shiʿism. Due to the lack of serious survey data,

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[17]  www.TelevisionWashington.com, 2 Day 1388 [23 December 2009].

[18]  www.TelevisionWashington.com, 15 Day 1388 [5 January 2010].

[19]  WashingtonTV, 29 December 2009. (http://televisionwashington.com/floater_article1 .aspx?lang=en&t=1&id=16876

it is hard to say where an individual citizen's identity lies, whether they live inside the country or reside abroad. At best, it should be a confused one revolving around some convenient self-serving identity with selective cultural nuances.

In the policy toward religious minorities, there remains an important difference between the Persian nationalism (with secular overtones) of the monarchist regime and the Shi'i-egocentrism of the religious State. The former was more inclined to a policy of homogenization than the latter (Sanasarian 2000: 15; 54–6).[20] It insisted on inclusivity, at least ideologically, while prejudice and stereotypes remained below the surface. The mixing of members of religious and ethnic minorities was encouraged and welcomed.

The Shi'i theocracy is exclusive by design, resulting in separation and segmentation along religious lines. Emphasis on Twelver Shi'ism as a state ideology would not convert religious minorities but simply reinforce their own identity. Perpetual discrimination against Sunnis and non-Muslims has made them more of a Sunni and a non-Muslim than ever before. Such a narrow particularistic religious dictatorship has been maintained merely by intimidation and coercion. The objective here has been to obtain and use state power against enemies, both internal and external. The main challenge and power struggle continues to be within the Shi'i majority society and the State.

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CONCLUSION

NATION-BUILDING AND MINORITY RIGHTS
IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Elizabeth Picard

Numerous and converging indications suggest that the religious minorities of the Middle East are living at a critical juncture in this early twenty-first century. Every other day, news media bring the subject to the front pages, reporting tensions raised in Algeria by the conversion of a few dozen citizens to Christian evangelism, persecutions suffered by non-Muslims in Northern Iraq, and sectarian strife in the rest of the country or in Lebanon. And while full of promises, the revolutionary wind blowing from the Persian Gulf to the Atlantic in the early 2010s raises new questions. What is often referred to as a global minority crisis 'in the Arab world' or 'in the Muslim world' is a complex phenomenon which combines structural and cultural dimensions, and needs to be examined in light of its historical background and sociological context. On the one hand, it is a structural crisis where demography and law are determining factors. A long-term difference in birth rates and emigration traditions between religious and confessional groups[1] has resulted in deep demographic imbalance, while several decades of discriminating legislation have deepened the gap (Courbage and Fargues 1997; Jones 2006: 252.). On the other hand, the current 'minority crisis' is a crisis of *difference*: a crisis where "relation between individuals is characterised by uncertainty" because the old social and cultural order is falling apart (Balandier 1986: 501). Together, structural and cultural factors combine. In view of the hundreds of thousands of people who took refuge in another country of the Middle East or emigrated to the West during the recent decades, we cannot but acknowledge that several

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[1] In the following I use the term "confessional" to mean both religious and confessional, since a confessional group is *de facto* part of a larger religious one. However, in this chapter, the variable of interest is less the doctrine or faith of the group than its collective social identity. For this reason, I use the terms 'community' to refer to the group as a social organization, and 'communalism' as a sociological concept and a social formation in history. To refer to the collective political identity and mobilization of the group, I use the terms 'sect' and 'sectarianism'. Cf. Joseph and Pillsbury 1978.

religious and confessional minorities do not enjoy freedom in their home-
land, where they may be symbolically excluded from the public sphere and
political life and most often oppressed and even condemned to exile. To
use *Hirschmanian* categories, their response to their precarious situation
is either *exit* or silence (Hirschman 1970).

In several circumstances this existential crisis has led to multidimen-
sional violence: the structural violence of unequal constitutional laws
enacted for specific identity groups; the spatial displacement or forced
exile of local communities; assaults against individuals; street fighting along
lines separating religious or sectarian communities; or even unnamed civil
war. Truly, the social sciences cannot underestimate the seriousness of a
crisis which concerns several local states to different degrees. Both history
and sociology are needed to look into the genealogy of the crisis and take
its context into account in order to overcome the blunt characterisation
of violence against religious minorities as a cultural stigma, specifically
associated with the societies and polities of the Middle East. Political
sociology, for its part, is required to shed light on the complex relation
between the political power—'the state'—which claims sovereignty and
the exclusive use of 'legitimate violence' (or legal use of force), on the one
hand, and subordinated and discriminated sectarian communities, on the
other hand.

In order to do so, this chapter is organised under three main themes.
First, it offers a retrospective look at the process of importation and
adaptation of the nation-state formula in the newly created and/or newly
independent entities of the Middle East. The main hypothesis is that
diverging constitutional choices—either the choice of government of the
demographic majority (*Tocquevillian* democracy), or the choice of 'consen-
sus democracy'—namely the government of a coalition of identity groups
acknowledging specific constitutional rights for the minorities (Lijphart
1999)—shaped state-society relations differently in each country of the
region, where they yielded both positive and negative effects which need
to be assessed.

Second, this chapter reflects on today's revival of the minority issue and
endeavours to analyze its specificity. My contention is that the minority
crisis of today is radically different from the crisis which stirred social
and political mobilisations in the nineteenth century, although it is also
the product of a combination of a specific international conjuncture—
"glocalization" (Roudomatof 2005)—and its internalisation by local soci-
eties in the Middle East. Namely, I assume that the authoritarian regimes
established in the region since the mid-1950s tend to compensate for the

failure of their pro-active national development policies and flamboyant regional ambitions by 'redeploying the state': leaving the management of national economies to private actors and investing rather in security and in the cultural and religious sectors they had until then neglected (Levy 2006). Correlatively, the minority issue becomes the great "question of the century" (Debray 2008: 227), fed by exacerbated identity fundamental-isms and established at the global level as a legitimate problem through the birth of a new international humanitarian law. This is why the term 'minority' should be discussed beyond its indistinct reference to groups whose self-designation, legal status and political function vary widely (Bengio, Ben-Dor 1999).[2]

In the third part, I look at Middle East identity mobilisations in the defence and promotion of minority groups and show how they mirror the nationalist ideologies of the ruling regimes, often using the same resources and the same strategies, thus questioning the supposed contrast between the powerful state and the powerless minority. My hypothesis is that the ruling power and the minority compete in the construction of we-groups. They concur in the strengthening of identity boundaries in order to gain access to limited material and symbolic resources. In this respect, religious diasporas play a specific role in politicising identities at home, exposing them, and supporting them. However, the surprising resilience of the nation-state suggests that what is taking place between state leadership and minority groups in many countries of the Middle East is a political exchange, of specific nature and means, which challenges the notion of citizenship.

Examination of these three dimensions of the minority issue in the Middle East needs to be carried out in comparative perspective in order to open up the understanding of a region often labelled as 'exceptional' and un-amenable to global change. At the same time, a sound comprehension of the current situation requires taking into account the specific historical trajectory of each local state. Therefore, I use the perspective of historical sociology to try to read the current crisis in light of the crisis that struck religious minorities in the late Ottoman era, after the adoption of a revolutionary code of citizenship and the growing interference of European powers in the affairs of the Empire's non-Muslim minorities (Karpat 1992).

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[2] For lack of respect of such a requirement, analysis might be plagued by ideological prejudice.

To this day, the legacy of the *millet* system,[3] the recognition of freedom of religion and culture (and sometimes language), and the allocation of a specific personal status to non-Muslim confessional communities are the major stakes of the legal and judicial institutions in most regional states. At the time of independence, a large majority of them took account of the confessional variable when enacting and applying personal and family law. Some of them even inscribed the legal pluralism inherited from the Ottomans into their constitutional rule. Today, the *millet* system—or at least its remainders—imposes a specific meaning (Geertz 1973: 12–3) to the organisation of the local societies. It provides clues for understanding the power brokering at work between the minorities and the state. As a result, "[its legacy] distils complex social categories into bounded categories whose correspondence to reality is problematic" (Peteet 2008: 550). By consequence, it is a controversial concept, as some analysts consider it a source of inspiration for liberalising the status of minority groups, while others denounce its fragmenting role and the subsequent paralysis of the nation-building process in the Middle East.

## Minorities and Nation-States

Middle Eastern states—either succeeding empires, like Turkey and Iran, or resulting from decolonisation, like most Arab states and Israel—were inspired by, and modelled along, the twentieth century European model of the nation-state. This genealogy is not always explicit in the institutions of the independent state, as it is often denied by its political elite. Still, it is easily discernable over a wide spectrum of political regimes as diverse as family emirates in the Arabian Peninsula, hereditary republics like Syria, regimes which refer primarily to Islamic rule such as Iran or Sudan, or marginal cases such as Somalia whose statist identity appears dubious. In spite of the strong influence of the secularist model,[4] an overwhelming majority of the local states took into account the confessional variable when

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[3] "The *millet* system of the Ottoman Empire enabled Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities to co-exist more or less peacefully, each with their own form of self-government. While the *millet* system was generally humane and tolerant of group differences, it was not a liberal society, for it did not tolerate individual dissent within its constituent communities. Rather it was a deeply conservative, theocratic and patriarchal society". Kymlicka 1992: 143.

[4] Including separation between state and religion, which has become a major characteristic of contemporary Britain and France, the former major colonial powers in the Middle East.

enacting personal and family law and organising the cultural dimension of their public life; even the most secular among them, such as the Turkish Republic and the Tunisia of Bourguiba, could not ignore the impact of religious identities on the basic social dynamics in their country.[5]

When it came to enacting a constitution and adopting a modern mode of political representation, these states chose between one of the two options offered in Western Europe at that time: majority rule and consensus rule.

### Majority Rule and the Denial of Cultural Differences

In the so-called Tocquevillian model, the party and leader who secure the numerical plurality of votes in more or less fair, more or less open, electoral processes enjoy the legitimate right to govern and impose upon state and society their own identity and cultural preferences (Tocqueville1951: 374). When the political system presents a certain degree of democracy, it is open to a certain degree of uncertainty, and today's majority might eventually become tomorrow's minority (Przeworski 1988). Also, majority democracy is open to arrangements with minority groups and is required to organise the legal protection of their collective rights (Lijphart 1991).

In most of the countries which emerged in the Middle East at the beginning of the twentieth century, majority rule bore another meaning, and rested on another rationale: in order to strengthen their new and often fragile power, the rulers held a discourse of unanimity, either in support of a charismatic or traditional leader, or based on a nationalist ideology. Authoritarian regimes were prone to deny cultural (either religious or ethnic) pluralism, suppress minority claims, and even eradicate minority movements in the name of a shared national identity. This was the case when the young Turkish Republic expelled non-Muslim populations from Anatolia in the 1920s, and when Arab regimes such as the Iraqi and Yemeni monarchies tolerated anti-Jewish pogroms and supported the massive emigration of their Jewish communities organised by Israel in the 1950s.

In 1951, Colonel Shishakli, Syria's strong man, banished all references to confessional affiliations in official data such as the national census and in the political sphere. Invoking modernity, he suppressed the parliament seats traditionally reserved for religious minorities. The rhetoric of this eradication was that the implementation of the principle of secularism

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[5]  In these 'secular' states, religious institutions are not autonomous from the state, and Islam remains a constant reference, implicit or explicit, for the regime (Webb 2008).

shielded non-Muslims from being stigmatised because of their religious identity, and that the common Arab identity of the Syrian people subsumed any sub-national cultural difference.[6] Since that period, parliamentary representation in Syria is based on formal equality between citizens (one man one vote), and the only difference admitted is between 'workers' (wage—earners) and other citizens, in order to enhance the representation of the former. This system is purported to be best suited to guarantee individual rights and collective democracy. The state leadership, supposedly issued from the national majority, claims to be accountable for its public policies only to "exquisite citizens" freed from their confessional (or ethnic) prison (Gellner in Leca and Schemeil 1983: 479).

In the last decades, an alternative discourse of unanimity has tended to substitute for secular nationalism, namely the reference to the Muslim identity of an overwhelming majority of the local populations. In the Middle East, several governments amended the national constitution and promulgated new laws to stress the Islamic nature of their regime. Beyond their deep differences in nature and processes, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Wahhabite Saudi monarchy and the Sudanese religious dictatorship epitomize this trend. Their central reference to Islam allow each of them to rule arbitrarily in the name of equity, social justice and common good, and by the same token to claim to protect non-Muslim minorities maintained under their domination by means of social contracts ('pacts'). Majority rule, in these cases, amounts to the impossibility of integration of individuals belonging to minority groups into the national community and their forced submission to the dominant rule.

Ever since the mid-1950s, the authoritarian implementation of the so-called majority rule and reference to an exclusive or dominant common identity has amounted to the imposition of a "forced consensus" on religious out-groups (Copeaux 2000). What was really taking place was that a family or clannish coalition managed to seize power by violent and/or illicit means, and monopolize political and economic positions in several kingdoms and republics of the Middle East. Instead of governing for the sake of the nation, these rulers co-opt and exclude segments of the society on a regional, ethnic or confessional basis, sometimes imposing a ruling majority at odds with its demographic and social weight.[7] Among many

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6  In Syria as in Iraq and Turkey, such a stance was first and foremost anti-Kurdish.

7  In several cases they condemned the demographic majority to political minorisation and forbade the birth of a program-based alternative majority. Cf. Salamé 1991.

documented cases, we can mention the examples of Syria, governed by members of the Alawi sect (11 percent of the nation's population) since 1970; of Iraq, tyrannised by Saddam and his Sunni Baʻth ist networks[8] from 1969 to 2003; and the case of Bahrain, where a Sunni monarchy still rules over a 65 percent Shiʻi majority.

Although more recent, experiments with the so-called 'Islamic rule' have proved even more detrimental to minorities because of the discrepancy between legally imposed inequalities and official claims for theocratic universalism. In the eyes of a ruler claiming a privileged link between God and society, minority groups—even those granted a legal status and some kind of state protection such as *ahl al-kitāb*[9]—remain social anomalies meant to be either assimilated by the *umma* or expelled from it. Consequently, Bahảis are persecuted in Islamic Iran, the Sudanese regime fights continuous wars against its animist and Christian populations, and the Saudis treat their Shiʻis as a second class population at best.

Under such rulers, societal response to the alternative integration/exclusion (either you belong to *the* nation or you are condemned to symbolic or physical exile) revolved around the three famous Hirschmanian strategic categories: either tacit submission ('loyalty'), because the dominant discourse could only be challenged in privacy; or exposure and political mobilisation ('voice') against the rule of unanimity; or concealment and exile ('exit'), because the cost of the other strategies was not sustainable.[10] Until 1990, when the conflict between the capitalist and socialist worlds prevailed and kept 'in the fridge' ethnic and religious identities, most religious minorities of the Middle East chose the first response. Also, many minority members expected to be part of the promised national development, either as its beneficiaries like any citizen, or as actors, because they enjoyed a high level of education and proficiency. In fact, a noticeable number of minority members did benefit from upward mobility in the 'nationalist' decades. For example, the history of Egypt in the 1940s and 1950s echoed with the names of Coptic leaders and intellectuals deeply involved in their nation's development. All over the Middle East, Christians and Jews were numerous in Communist and leftist parties, convinced as they were of sharing with their Muslim fellow citizens a common secular faith in development. Correlatively, local leaders and ignorant or accomplice

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[8]  By network I mean stable schemes of horizontal interaction.

[9]  People of the Holy Book, meaning mainly Christians and Jews.

[10]  For an example of the alternative see Bozarslan 2002: 137. On forced silence and the practice of *taqiya* (concealment), see the chapters by Firro and Louër, in this volume.

Western commentators were prone to praise the aggressive nation-building engineered by the state and to predict its progressive substitution for obsolete primordial identities—such as family links, clannish affiliations, attachment to a confessional community or an ethnic minority—that used to compete with one another and fragment the nation. Still, beneath this outward unanimity, intractable identity claims kept boiling, and they were occasionally suppressed with extreme state violence: examples are the crushing of the Muslim Brotherhood in Hama (Syria) in 1982, the assassination of members of the Sadr *sāda'* family in Najaf (Iraq) and the deportation of thousands of Shi'is in April 1980 (Tripp 2002: 229–31), or the military suppression of Shi'i demonstrations in the Eastern Saudi province of Hassa in the late 1980s.

### Minority Representation and the Improbable Nation

After the end of the bipolar era and following the series of identity crises in the Balkans and the Caucasus, Middle East authoritarian states' claims to national unanimity lost their credibility domestically and internationally. A critical reappraisal of the legacy of empires in the region—the Ottoman and Safavid Empires, but also the European colonial empires in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—revealed the durable impact of their institutional engineering of societal pluralism. Social institutions, such as the *millet*, and political institutions, such as minority representation, were revisited, often to underline their efficiency in the peaceful regulation of state-society relations in contrast with the devastating effects of "unanimist" communist and socialist authoritarian regimes (Poulton 200). In addition to this powerful revisionism, constitutionalists who reflected on political engineering in the Middle East were deeply influenced by North American communitarianism (Etzione 1998).[11] Post-conflict constitutional schemes increasingly favoured political sectarianism, i.e. the representation of ascribed identity groups in state institutions, and consensus government, i.e. the government of a ruling coalition of sectarian (and/or other primordial identity) leaders.

   Although most of the Middle East states had broken off with pluralist representation at the time of independence or in the thrill of nationalist fever in the 1950s and 1960s, several of them kept elements of political confessionalism in their constitutional framework. For example, there are

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[11]  In reference to their attention to minority rights in today's diversifying societies.

traces of minority representation in the constitutional systems of states as distinct as the Islamic Republic of Iran (Sanasarian 2000),[12] Israel,[13] Palestine,[14] or Jordan, where a quota of nine seats is reserved for Christians in the National Assembly (*majlis al-umma*).[15] In these states, identity plays a crucial role in the distribution and exercise of power. Moreover, the relationship between the state and social groups, but also between the state and individuals belonging to these groups, remains partly based on ascribed identities rather than on acquired qualities and virtues or constructed interests. Ascribed identities are held as the legitimate criteria to confer cultural, educational and even territorial autonomy, and, more generally, to distribute functions, positions, and material and symbolic public goods. There is more: the majority itself, either demographic or political, has, in its turn, become contaminated by the practices of the leadership and tends also to establish its relationship to the state through confessional criteria, playing on the centrality of its identity within the polity. Both government policies and societal responses concur to reinforce sectarian discourses, behaviour and interactions. Finally, the society as a whole tends to formulate its political expectations and demands in terms of identity privileges, frustration or alienation.

Identity politics gained momentum as development and welfare policies waned. It has been argued that, by producing an instant photograph of a country's diversity, the confessional (or ethnic) variable offers a fair criterion for distributing political (as well as economic and military) power between segments of the population. Once the groups are counted, fair distribution of power could be organised. Strong communal organisation and especially the presence of a powerful communal leadership might ensure better participation in the state. Rather than competing or splitting apart, the sectarian groups of a given country would supposedly become satisfied with their respective status and share of the cake, and be able to come to

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[12] The constitution of the Islamic Republic reserves four seats (out of 73) for deputies representing the Assyrian/Chaldean, Armenian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian communities. Cf. Sanasarian 2000. The Constitution *also* discriminates against religious minorities. Cf. Fédération internationale des Ligues des droits de l'Homme, 2003.

[13] The Jewish state acknowledges three "nationalities" (Jewish, Arab and Druze) with their separate identity and communal institutions, whose proximity to the state differs, for example, in military drafting and access to state employment.

[14] The Palestinian electoral Law of 1995 reserved a quota of 6 seats for the Christians and 1 for the Samaritans; in the new electoral Law (2005) 6 out of the 66 seats allocated to the majority system are reserved for Christians.

[15] At odds with their demographic weight (3–4%) but also with their remarkable share in the private economic power (40%), according to Sabbagh 2004.

an understanding over power devolution. Minorities, once recognised and legalised, might be full actors on the public scene (Hanf 1993).

Such a positive assessment stands in sharp contrast with the dramatic failure of 'majority' rule, a political system still plaguing several countries of the region at the turn of the millennium. Eager to see the Middle East 'democratize', the US and its allies not only launched devastating military campaigns, they also have ambitions to put an end to the local despotic regimes and their 'majority' rule, and they searched for constitutional systems altogether adapted to plural nations and respectful of liberal consensus. In the opinion of many international experts in state- and nation (re)-building, elite consensus becomes the key to fair political representation of minorities, as it is credited with organising fair power sharing between confessional (or ethnic) segments of a country's population. 'Lebanonisation', once a term which stigmatised the shattering agonistic societies in the Balkans, became a desirable model. In Lebanon, the executive and the legislature are meant to be equitably distributed along the supposed demographic weight of the 18 confessional indigenous groups, which are granted cultural, administrative and educational autonomy (Kerr 1966). The political history of modern Lebanon is referred to as a constant search for inter-confessional balance at state level, and for the government of a large coalition altogether representative of the country's major communities and respectful of its minorities.

Therefore, liberal (and supposedly democratic) consensus was chosen to rebuild the constitutional institutions of war-torn countries such as Iraq and Sudan. The Constitution of 2005 in Iraq[16] and the Sudan Peace Agreement in the same year[17] both entailed a mix of traditional individual federalism inspired by the Lebanese formula, in line with its Ottoman legacy, and by innovative and far-reaching territorial federalism. While the ethnic (Arab versus Kurdish) variable was prevalent in the Iraqi case, confessional affiliations tended to become the operative rationale behind regional mobilisations, party organisation, and even ideological division in the Arab two-thirds of the country. In Sudan, the distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim regions was the criterion for separate administration and different sets of laws. In a complete reversal of analysis, the homoge-

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[16] The Constitution adopted in January 2005 refers, in its Article 9, to the "components of the Iraqi people". The full text of the Iraqi Constitution approved by referendum has been translated from the Arabic by the United Nations' Office for Constitutional Support; See McGarry and O'Leary 2007.

[17] UN Security Council, *Press release* February 2, 2005.

neous and egalitarian nation-state promoted at the time of independence was now seen as an evil. An odd coalition of Orientalist scholars and neo-conservative administrators have re-discovered or re-invented the 'true' and intractable social dynamics of the local societies: tribes susceptible to be co-opted in the pro-American *sahwa* ("awakening") in Sunni Iraq, African versus Arab 'ethnies' (not to say races) segmenting the society in Darfur, and religious communities described as the inevitable and constant victims of discriminatory minority policies (Davis 2008: 556).

Real life, however, proved to be far from fulfilling these normative expectations. While democracy—or democratisation—became the slogan of constitutional engineering and good governance in the Middle East in the early years of the twenty-first century, one could not but notice the gap between principles and practices. Here again, the example of the post-Yugoslav Balkans was far from confirming the claim that constitutional promotion of primordial belonging is crucial to securing minority rights (ICG 9 March 2009). Not only have individuals in a given religious group remained unequal in their relation to their communal leadership, but inequality between sectarian groups before the law, as well as their unequal access to the state, have been institutionalized. In Middle Eastern countries, where the economy is most often characterised by the prevalence of rents over production profits, the exchange of loyalties and symbolic and material goods takes place along identity channels—confessional belonging being one of the most salient. In other words, identity politics establish clientelism as the privileged mode of political exchange (Roniger 2004). As a result, competition between sectarian groups for access to public goods feeds the persistent fragmentation of the nation and creates a deep sense of insecurity among minorities. Notwithstanding that, social dynamics (demographic change and social and spatial mobility) concur in belying the basis for the distribution of power and goods between sectarian groups, thus raising incessant frustration and contest as illustrated in post-civil war Lebanon, where the 'consensus' rule had been renewed and reinforced in the new Constitution of 1990, only to feed new sectarian strife (Salamey, Payne 2008).

The problem with the 'consensus' formula is that it locks up people in identity categories, instilling supposedly primordial differences in the political culture, submitting political negotiation to supposedly immutable rules, and paralysing governmental decision in the name of power-sharing. While no society, not even plural societies like those of the Middle East, is 'naturally' sectarian, taking the risk to enhance sectarianism cannot protect against authoritarianism. On the contrary, authoritarian regimes are keen

to take advantage of social segmentation and encourage political fragmentation in order to 'counterbalance' between rival confessional segments (Belkin, Schofer 2004). Comparative analyses concur: proportional representation of segmental groups—either family, clannish or local—might produce the closest image of social composition at a precise time, or at least the clearest image. It nevertheless results in locking up a society within the boundaries of primordial identities and, finally, in freezing and deepening its inner boundaries, with the risk of drawing a nation toward civil conflict and secession. Consensus democracy might help the empowerment of some segmental groups, especially confessional minorities, in the short term; it succeeded in Lebanon in the 1950s and 1960s, but it simultaneously hampers the promotion of collective interests such as the production and distribution of public goods; it paralyses trans-confessional dynamics, and denies them legitimate political expression (Picard 2010).

Certainly, the respective flaws of majority and consensus rules in securing fair minority representation and promoting democratic transition do not exonerate analysts and decision-makers for their long-lasting underestimation of minority issues in the Middle East (Picard 1980). After WW2, the imperative of top-down national development in countries then labelled 'underdeveloped' was promoted by liberal and Marxist theoreticians concurrently. They were far less attentive to primordial identity differences than to inequalities of revenue and class. The minorities they had in mind were sociological minorities: children deprived of access to health care and education; women deprived of equal human rights; and economically deprived peripheries. And they sometimes deliberately ignored cultural differences in the name of collective improvement. But today, as the cover is being lifted from the identity cauldron and the minority question has become a legitimate, and in some cases pressing, issue, we should be cautious not to be drawn into another hegemonic discourse; we should remain suspicious of the role of sectarian entrepreneurs in driving social dynamics, and of the negative effects of their instrumentalization.

### New Challenges for the State

The awakening of the 'minority question' in the Middle East was largely the product of the new conjuncture of the post-bipolar 1990s: domestically, authoritarian states were forced to become 'modest' and retreat from the economic field; in return they 're-deployed' and invested in the cultural and security fields; internationally, Western powers' and NGOs' awareness

of the issue of human and cultural rights grew in response to the growing tensions in the region and thanks to information channelled through diaspora networks.

The new visibility and topicality of the minority question can be linked with the re-deployment of the state in the Middle East, namely its retreat from the economic field and, in return, its strong involvement in the awakening and promotion of ascribed identities as well as in their securitisation.

Since the mid-1980s, a majority of governments in the region have been compelled to adopt structural adjustment plans and partially de-regulate their national economies under direct and indirect pressure from international financial institutions. In accordance with the new liberalisation dogmas, they chose to get rid of their redistributive policies, totally or partially. Most of them cut public subventions and reduced their intervention in the domains of health, education, housing, and subsidies for basic commodities. In order to trim the national budget they also suppressed a number of public jobs, traditionally destined to mask a high level of unemployment. These rough policies affected the local societies differently, according to their heterogeneity. At the core of each patrimonial state, the opening of the market (*infitāh*) to new bourgeoisies was organised and controlled by the same political military elite, and along the same primordial networks of identity (confessional and/or ethnic). Collaboration between political leaders and economic entrepreneurs took the form of clientelist exchange (dyadic and reciprocal) based on sectarian and matrimonial proximity. By contrast, distant peripheries, powerless social actors such as women and youth, and marginal cultural groups such as minority religious communities, were affected, as access to public goods became restricted through inter-personal filters. While facilitating an enlargement of the bourgeoisie, this new Middle East crony capitalism enhanced intra-sectarian solidarity and inter-sectarian competition by organising either rapprochement or marginalisation of given confessional groups (Johnson 1986; Kienle 1992; Bahout 1994).

As the domestic and foreign private sectors took the lead in the economic field, the domination of the state over its society through the redistribution of rents wore away, along with the discrediting of its legitimizing ideology (Henry, Springborg 2001). Hence, it became necessary for the state to re-deploy and invest in domains previously neglected. Monarchies as well as republics endeavoured to raise patriotic feelings among their population and replace trust in the welfare state by a new form of attachment to the regime. Their investment in identity politics took a strong discursive dimension: publication of history and civic education school books, glorification

of *turāth* (cultural heritage) and its display in newly built museums, and the intensive use of i.t. communication tools were used to re-invent and re-format collective identities based on affects and private memories (Gershoni, Jankowski 1997; Davis 2005). Moreover, the new patriotism promoted by the regimes stressed a new distinction, not between the domestic and the external realms but within the country, between the national community and its *domestic* enemies, between loyal citizens and Others whose affiliations remain dubious because they are not part of the confessional (or ethnic) ruling we-group, and therefore, suspect of foreign collusion. The most important political issues were now: in the name of which identity group the state acted, who was regarded as the state's legitimate owner, and who was entitled to its services (Wimmer 1997).[18] Therefore, politics became increasingly formulated and exerted in a non-negotiable mode, as if it implied subscribing to a rigid (ideological or religious) belief. Accordingly, the politicisation of sectarianism became a central aspect of state-building through which the 'people' and the regime are mutually related within the ideal of a legitimate order. While the nation-state was undermined both in ideal and implementation, ruling coalitions and their opponents were transformed into "tribes with flags" (Glass 1991).

The 're-islamisation' of state and society played a central part in this political re-configuration. During the modernisation decades, most rulers in the Middle East had distanced themselves from Islam. In the globalisation era, on the contrary, they made extensive use of Islam in order to rally popular majorities. They insisted on giving proofs of their own religious identity through participation in public prayer or in the *hajj* to Mecca. They encouraged, or at least tolerated, public display of religious belonging, such as the veil for women. They financed Muslim social and educational institutions and NGOs, whose quietist or Sufi orientation was supposed to counter jihadist influence, while compensating for the withdrawal of state institutions. While this strategy of re-islamisation strengthened their legitimacy in the short run, it also bore middle and long term divisive effects: the public display and legitimisation of confessional affiliation and the rehabilitation of religious actors induced sectarian segregation in the urban space, dissonances in dress codes and ethos, separate education, segregated socialities, and generally the organisation of separate cultural and political

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[18]  Referring to Harold Lasswell's famous definition: "Politics is about who gets what, when and how", Wimmer mentions *ethnic* groups, but his commentary also applies to other identity groups, e.g. confessional groups.

lives—a trend reminiscent of the closed society of the late Ottoman Empire, with its negative effect on civil society and entrepreneurial spirit.

Finally, identity politics initiated by Middle East authoritarian states in compensation for economic liberalisation bears a security dimension. While systematic statistical and police control substituted for development in power practices in a Foucaldian manner (Foucault 1983), the spreading of trans-boundary networks and global interdependence means that enemies of the state have to be fought within, precisely among minority groups supposedly alien to the identity and project of the political majority (Kumaraswamy 2003). In the past, communal groups opposed to the government were suspected of collusion with European powers; now they are accused of being 'agents' of Israel and the United States. Instead of being part of the legitimate political game, protestation by minorities became stigmatised as manipulation by the West and Israel, and repressed through land confiscation,[19] restriction of public expression, and heavy security rules.

### Minorities, 'the Issue of the Century'

The rise of identity politics on the domestic scene mirrored the change taking place on the international scene. Until recently, international law legislated exclusively about *native* minorities in colonisation states (e.g. the Inuit people). As for the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1966, it protects the cultural and religious rights of *individual* members of minority groups, respecting the sovereignty of the state and reflecting its reluctance to take into account sub-national collective aspirations—especially of a political order (Marquardt 1991; Henrad 2000). Then, in the 1990s, the fall of the Soviet Empire drew the minority issue 'out of the fridge'. A new legitimate problematic prevailed. International law specialists began elaborating a more extensive and politically consistent legal definition of the minority. "National minority" was henceforth considered a cultural entity, concentrated on a territory, with a past experience of political independence before it was incorporated into a larger state entity (Kymlicka 2001: 17–38).

In this era of globalisation, the minority issue is established as a central preoccupation of humanitarian law and advocacy NGOs. Simultaneously, academic studies, media denunciation, and pro-active policies overstep

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[19] See the chapter by Kårtveit, in this volume.

international boundaries. International advocacy and relief NGOs take the lead in the promotion of the collective rights and protection of the groups they judge to be persecuted due to their confessional (or ethnic) affiliations. They keep demanding that several Middle Eastern states revise the legal status of these groups and adopt 'universal' criteria for national integration. For every state of the Middle East, respect for minority rights has become—together with women's rights—the barometer of its successful transition to democracy. Paradoxically, this criterion is also brandished *a contrario* to denounce the 'authoritarian exception' of the Arab and Muslim worlds, notwithstanding the diversity of cultures in the region and the complex history of each state formation in the colonial and post-colonial eras (Schmitter 1999; Lakoff 2004). But experience shows that whenever the minority issue is promoted on the political scene and the powerlessness of a minority underlined, it is done in a normative way and for a normative purpose. Formally latent social formations and affiliations are activated in order to re-organise hierarchies of power according to a pre-determined scheme, seemingly convenient for those who manipulate them.[20]

  A critical examination of their ethical stand reveals that, while NGO militants have a direct and non-ideological knowledge of local situations and generally display proper commitment to human rights, their administration, leadership, financial and logistical resources are rooted physically and ideally in Europe and North America. Like the European powers who established themselves as the "protectors" of the Christian communities in the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century, the major powers of the twenty-first century under the pressure of missionaries and colonial entrepreneurs, allow themselves to ascribe the quality of 'minority' to groups that never defined themselves as such before. They design and implement authoritative policies to deal with their cases. As a matter of consequence, together with international humanitarian institutions such as the International Criminal Court, NGOs tend to reflect a view of the world, with its values, hierarchies. and rules, which is far from 'neutral', to use the Weberian theory. And like any actor in the international arena they are inevitably influenced by (material and symbolic) power pressures.

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[20] See for example the scholarly literature published in the 2000s in support for US administration policy in the Middle East, arguing that local societies remained organised in sects and tribes.

In this era of globalisation and inter-dependency, protection of minorities has become a "formidable tool for a power to intervene in another state's domestic affairs" (Corm 2006: 64). It may be used by a coalition of NGOs and states as was the case for the Darfur in the 2000s; it may even be invoked by a great power intervening militarily in a neighbouring state, like Russia 'defending the rights' of the Ossetians in Georgia in 2008. Unfortunately, the philosophical notion and the legal definition of 'the minority' remain exploited by strategic stakes and powers' interests. While it rightly emerged from an oppressing silence, the minority issue remains controversial and blurred.

### Competition, Integration or Adaptation?

Actors of the Middle Eastern public arena, be they states, organised communities or even national NGOs, prove to be sensitive to the current international debate on the minority issue—even in countries the most protected from external influence, such as the Islamic Republic. They also react and adapt to domestic societal dynamics in such a way that the politicisation of primordial identities can be described as an interactive process: first, it is a two-level process, taking place simultaneously at the state and official institutional level and at the societal level of routine encounters and dynamics; then, the politicisation process implies that state and society act, react, and carry out successive adjustments of frame and practices. The *mimesis* between the ruling group ('the state') and the opposition has been underlined in the case of ethnic minorities such as the Kurds in Turkey and Arab lands, who borrowed nationalism and other ideological and institutional tools for nation-building from their rulers and adapted them in order to dominate their own society (Bozarslan 1997). But *mimesis* was rarely observed in the case of sectarian groups, because few of them raised their identity claims to the point of demanding greater autonomy, as have some segments of the Assyrian community in Syria, or even calling for secession, as have some political parties in southern Sudan or in Lebanon during the civil war.

Most confessional communities, while not adopting such extreme positions, are prone to shape their collective identity according to the 'national' model,[21] i.e. through discrete cultural, moral and sociological—not to men-

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[21] In this respect, the translation of *millet* by "nation" has induced much confusion since the nineteenth century.

tion psychological or physical—traits. They also borrow the social engineering and political practices used by the state in order to build their own national community, organise its institutions, and mobilise its members. They use the same strategies and the same resources—inventing genealogies and hierarchies, distributing goods and security, repressing dissidents (Picard 1994). Paradoxically, in their competition for the construction of rival we-groups, the ruling power and the minority concur in strengthening mutually exclusive identity boundaries in order to take over limited material and symbolic resources. Together they turn dormant and fluctuating collective identities into tangible sectarian groups. Diasporas have become a driving force behind this interactive process as they exacerbate identity fundamentalisms at the two ends of the migratory network.[22] As a result, the minority issue succeeds in opening a new debate and entailing new political negotiations within several Middle Eastern states. It challenges the relation between the ruling power and the population and calls for a reappraisal of the notion of citizenship.

### Local Identities, Nationalism, and Diaspora

An imported ideology, nationalism has been willingly adopted by the ruling elite of the Middle East since the nineteenth century. It gave meaning to their disrupted political life, allowed them to rely to their past, and project into their future.[23] Nationalism also spread among members of the confessional (and ethnic) elite who did not wish to return to the *millet* system, with all its limits and flaws, and could not return to it anyway, after the imperial order was swept by the creation of nation-states. Now, the model for collective demands and the promotion of an identity group implied territorial sovereignty, homogeneous cultural identity, and political autonomy (Masters 2001: 189–99). Between conflicting ambitions, there was hardly a middle ground: wherever the governing state was denying minority rights, the confessional minority denied belonging to the nation-state, thus raising the level of contest and tension between dominant and minority ideologies.

   A noticeable change in the globalisation era is that minorities, once denied access to the public space, oppressed, and sometimes physically threatened in their homeland, turn *en masse* from 'exit' to 'voice' at the

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[22]  See Delhaye, in this volume.
[23]  Michel Foucault calls this temporary shared meaning "regime of subjectivity." Foucault 1976: 1001–26.

instigation of their exiled members (Appadurai 2006: 49–87). In their new migratory space, these migrant members generally enjoy freedom of faith and expression. Consequently, they are prone to re-politicisation and to turn into 'cultural mediators', especially when they benefit from dual citizenship. Of course, diaspora involvement in democratisation processes in the original homeland should not be over-estimated, as diasporas are generally made of people who migrated to flee from dictatorship and secure their family life, not to become militants (Daum 2005: 1). Still, diaspora mediators, with the support of international and transnational actors, contribute to raise the level of conflict between state and minorities through their radical nationalist discourse and material support to local militants. Geographical distance (as most Middle Eastern migrants settled in North America, Europe or Australia) and the passing of time (as some diasporas are several decades, sometimes centuries, old) induce them to mythologize history and re-invent an idealised common identity, altogether rooted in a romanticised past and projected in a dazzling future (Koselleck 2004: 20–5). Because they ignore the daily accommodation experienced by their fellow minority members who stayed put in the country, migrants tend to be more radical, to the point of endangering the local community.

A striking illustration is offered by the case of the Assyrians. At the turn of the twenty-first century, members of the Nestorian (autonomous) and Chaldean (Catholic) Assyrian communities who left southern Turkey, northern Iraq, and eastern Syria during the twentieth century outnumbered by four times their local confessional fellows, whose number kept dwindling in reaction to Kurdish nationalist mobilisations, Arab states' repressive policies, and lately, the wars in Iraq. At the end of the migratory network, Assyrian *exilés* in North America became as mobilised as their Middle Eastern fellows were silent. Anticipating a turn in the regional balance of power after the US invasion of Iraq, they have begun acting as substitutes for the failing local regimes and financing the construction of schools, health centres, language teaching institutions, and also of oversized churches in order to raise the visibility of the community, especially in the remote underdeveloped Syrian Jazirah. Their numerous and vibrant websites and news agencies harbour confusion between confessional and national belonging. On the one hand, they negotiate with the local states on behalf of the community; on the other hand, they interpret any public policy decision as a possible means to victimize their community, any political vote or deliberation as a danger to survival. And, finally, they formulate projects of autonomy, and even independence, that are completely

at odds with the reality on the ground.[24] In this matter, they offer a vivid example of the mixture of powerlessness and empowerment, of escalation and compromise, of attachment and alienation, which characterise minorities in the Middle East today.

It can be argued that, "outdoing [the ruling power] has become the self-defence tactic of the minority" (Debray 2008: 220). In the decade 2000 such a trend could be observed all over the Middle East, and it was emphasized locally by a generation of intellectuals and cadres better educated and endowed with better resources than their elders of the previous decades. While the defence and promotion of justice and civil rights generally benefit from their enhanced capabilities, the durable frustration of minority groups offers a fertile ground for the birth and growth of intolerance and mutual exclusion. In reaction, state nationalism stiffens, as it, too, is rooted in cultural references and loaded with collective emotions, but armed with superior asymmetric power. And as everywhere else in the world, political and sectarian entrepreneurs ride over popular feelings to enhance their own power and wealth. The political arena has become the battlefield for competing segmented interests instead of the search for common good. Each fundamentalism feeds a rival fundamentalism as observed in the growing importance of religious parties in Israel and Palestine (Keddie 1998: 696–723). The 'communitarian disease', a mixture of collective representations and strategic calculation of greedy leaders, which had destroyed Lebanon in 1975–1990, plagues the Middle East (Rodinson 1989; Todorov 1995: 96).

*Renewing the Political Exchange*

Neither in its former integrative version nor in its latter pluralistic clientelist version does the authoritarian state in the Middle East resolve the minority issue. The ruling regimes appear unable to overcome increasing minority mobilisations, in spite of their ever more powerful and sophisticated communication and security tools. At the end of the first decade of the millenium, the state is paralysed in Lebanon; it is threatened with implosion in Iraq; shaken by popular insurrections in Syria and in several countries of the Arabian Peninsula and the Maghreb. Nearly two decades

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[24] On the Columbia University Network on minorities, the Assyrians of the Middle East are represented by six websites—more than the Armenians but second to the Jews (42) and the Kurds (47). Some of them, like the Assyrian International News Agency, offer a constant denunciation of Syrian oppression of Assyrians.

after the 'great transformation' of 1989, the point at issue remains for these states to accommodate individual human rights and cultural demands of confessional (and ethnic) minorities *and* to do so in securing the continuity of public services, respecting the rule of law, and guaranteeing the fair management of collective goods in a secure territorial space. After the failure, first of the development and unanimity model, then of the liberal divisive model, what is now at stake is the renewal of the terms of the political exchange between state and society according to a new institutional framework (North 1990; Painter 2000). For local societies at large, this implies a revolutionary turn in constitutional and juridical terms as attempted in 2011 by Tunisia and Egypt: the return of the rule of law and the instauration of participatory democracy. And for confessional (and ethnic) groups, it implies specific changes.

Middle Eastern states will remain stuck in intractable identity conflicts as long as they do not envisage a limited reconfiguration of power by adding to the three constitutionally legitimate dimensions of citizenship (civic, political and human), the promotion of individual and collective *cultural* rights in their society and polity and, more specifically, in their constitutional law. Because identity politics has become a dominant preoccupation all over the world in this early twenty-first century, such a change of configuration is needed in many states, democratic and authoritarian. However, in the Middle East, where national identity was more often than not built on the false premises of cultural homogeneity, the political centre can hardly acknowledge pluralism without de-legitimizing itself. This is often where the democratization process meets its limits and where the notion of *political exchange* becomes operational: the state could exchange some measures of cultural autonomy for the compliance of the minority within its collective regulation. It should make up the economic deficit of its cultural—more precisely, religious—peripheries, meet some of their symbolic demands in matters of public display of identities and collective commemorations, and eventually satisfy their claims for more autonomy of cultural and educational institutions. At this point, the state would not have to acknowledge a *nationalist* character to the demands of the sectarian groups.[25] Co-existence between the (state) national culture and religious sub-cultures would subsequently be organised following the principle of 'hegemonial exchange' i.e. mutual accommodation between the autono-

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[25] This is probably the watershed separating confessional demands from ethnic demands, as ethnic identities/movements are prone to morphing into identities/national movements.

mous (better than 'powerful') central state and less autonomous (rather than 'powerless') segmented interests "on the basis of commonly accepted procedural norms, rules, or understandings" (Rothschild 1985: 98–101). A positive point in this direction is that Arab political sociology establishes a distinction between *jinsiyya* (nationality) and *muwātana* (citizenship). This suggests its affinities with the liberal model of distinction between cultural and political identities. It opens the way for a possible coexistence of a public space blind to cultural differences with differentiated communal spaces,[26] although a delicate point concerns the difficulty of 'neutralising' Islam in the constitutional framing of the Middle East states in view of its historical and ethical weight.

More generally, a positive political exchange between state centre and religious peripheries cannot take place as long as local polities are plagued by a deficit in the respect of civic, political and human rights—a deficit affecting every citizen, irrespective of his/her confessional or cultural (or ethnic) identity. Here again, the minority issue in the Middle East proves to be closely related to the issue of democratization and the respect of the rule of law: on the one hand, collective minority demands might be alleviated by the promotion of individual rights; on the other hand, respected individuals would become respectful citizens; they might promote the virtues and loyalties required by democratic citizenship, among which would be the acceptance of identity differences. Nation-building and minority rights might improve dialectically.

*Conclusion*

It is difficult to conclude a chapter such as this one, because this early twenty-first century is probably witnessing the peak of identity politics all over the world. Like development theory, identity politics might display its flaws, encounter its limits, and be dismissed in the coming period. This makes today's reflection upon religious minorities in the Middle East all the more fragile. It is also why scholars should be wise to keep in mind two basic principles in social sciences: first, that identity discourses and processes always need to be read in a historical and constructivist perspective (Brubaker, Cooper 2000); second, that issues such as the minority issue

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[26] A source of inspiration might be the Habermassian model of 'constitutional patriotism' combining a civic ideology with the public respect of differences. Habermas 2001.

are at risk to remain being assessed through a normative lens as long as they are not studied in a comparative perspective.

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