POLITICS OF RECOGNITION AND DENIAL. MINORITIES IN THE MENA REGION

S. Kawakibi (Ed.), S. Bennis, G. Fahmi, P. Maggiolini

EUROMESCO
JOINT POLICY STUDY

11

EuroMeSCo

ARAB
REFORM
INITIATIVE
مبادرة الإصلاح العربي

IEMed. -

IEMed.
European Institute of the Mediterranean

Consortium formed by:
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation
Government of Catalonia
Barcelona City Council

Board of Trustees - Business Council:

Corporate Sponsors
- Banc Sabadell
- Caixa Bank
- Gas Natural Fenosa
- Iberia
- Port de Barcelona
- Port de Tarragona

Partner Institutions
- Cambra de Comerç de Barcelona
- ESADE
- Foment de Treball Nacional
- IESE Business School
- PIMEC
- Societat Econòmica Barcelonesa d'Amics del País (SEBAP)

JOINT POLICY STUDY
Published by the European Institute of the Mediterranean

Editorial team:
Aleksandra Chmielewska, Emmanuel Cohen-Hadria

Proof-reading: Neil Charlton
Layout: Núria Esparza
ISSN: 2462-4500
Legal deposit: B 13808-2018
May 2018

EUROMED

This publication has been produced with the assistance of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the authors and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union or the European Institute of the Mediterranean.

The coordinator of the group would like to thank the participants of the Dialogue Workshop held in Beirut at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs on 1 November 2017, the reviewer, Lurdes Vidal, Director of the Arab World and Mediterranean Department, the IEMed for supporting project implementation and the European Union for co-financing the project.

CONTENTS

Politics of Recognition and Denial. Minorities in the MENA Region

FOREWORD. *Salam Kawakibi* 6

THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE IDEA OF “MINORITY” IN THE MENA REGION: A MULTILEVEL ANALYSIS. *Paolo Maggiolini* 10

THE FUTURE OF SYRIAN CHRISTIANS AFTER THE ARAB SPRING. *Georges Fahmi* 48

QUESTIONNEMENTS ET PERSPECTIVES DE LA GOUVERNANCE DE LA DIVERSITÉ CULTURELLE AU MAROC. *Said Bennis* 68

Foreword

Salam Kawakibi[*]

---

[*] Associate Researcher, ARI – Arab Reform Initiative; Director, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies – Paris

L'instrumentalisation des clivages sectaires par les acteurs étatiques et non étatiques, les violences à caractère sectaire, les persécutions auxquelles font face divers groupes ethniques et religieux et les menaces de partition ou de séparation qui constituent aujourd'hui un scénario réel, font de la question des minorités un enjeu essentiel de l'équilibre de la région MENA. La gestion de la diversité demeure un critère déterminant pour évaluer les transitions politiques en cours dans cette région. L'approche proposée par ce projet consiste à mettre en avant la dimension politique et globale du fait minoritaire, à contre-courant des interprétations culturalistes et religieuses qui prévalent. Les discours sectaires et ethniques ne sont pas nouveaux. Ils ont en revanche été maquillés durant des décennies pour servir des velléités autoritaires. Avec l'échec de l'État-nation né après les guerres d'indépendance, les pouvoirs politiques n'ont pas voulu faire face à la composition complexe de la société, et ont préféré se dissimuler derrière le mythe d'une cohabitation exemplaire entre les composantes ethniques et religieuses. Dans certains pays, l'instrumentalisation des minorités est devenue un outil minutieusement manié par les pouvoirs politiques. Parfois, le totalitarisme « local » a dépassé l'occupation coloniale dans l'application de la devise « diviser pour mieux régner ». Les despotes ont prétendu incarner l'unité nationale, alors que tout porte à penser qu'ils ont tout fait pour empêcher sa pérennité en suspendant la citoyenneté.

Ainsi, la prise en otage des minorités ethniques et religieuses est un fait bien établi. Les pouvoirs politiques, avec une gestion volontairement défaillante de la diversité, ont renforcé les fissures au sein de leurs sociétés, tout en prétendant faire le contraire. Deux des ressorts de cette politique minutieuse étaient de susciter la peur de l'autre et de décourager tout sentiment d'appartenance nationale. Dans le cas syrien par exemple, le régime autoritaire a appliqué la répression « sélective » face aux contestations qui ont débuté en 2011. Par peur des représailles ou par conviction, le clergé officiel, capté par le pouvoir, a joué un rôle primordial dans le renforcement de ce climat.

La notion de « minorité », si elle se limite à une définition classique, doit être contestée. Il s'agit en effet davantage d'une notion politique que sectaire ou ethnique. Il ne faut certainement pas réfuter catégoriquement la dimension confessionnelle et ethnique, mais il est préférable de considérer que la vraie minorité est la majorité du peuple dans toute sa diversité ethnique et communautaire. Ce sont donc celles et ceux qui sont exclus de l'espace public et privés de leurs droits, notamment celui de s'exprimer librement.

Cette étude s'articule autour de trois chapitres. Le premier, de Paolo Maggiolini, s'attèle à l'analyse de l'origine et du développement du concept de minorité dans la région, un concept élastique qui requiert de bien comprendre la situation géopolitique de la région.

Le chapitre s'intéresse aussi à la question de la gestion des minorités et aux politiques publiques mises en place dans ce contexte. L'interaction entre les crises de l'État et celles des minorités représente un axe primordial de la réflexion.

Le deuxième chapitre, de Georges Fahmi, se concentre sur la relation des chrétiens avec l'État avant 2011 et après le printemps arabe. Il se penche sur les différents positionnements des membres de la communauté par rapport au soulèvement populaire, en identifiant les facteurs qui les influencent. Le chapitre examine l'instrumentalisation des minorités par les différents acteurs en présence (acteurs locaux, nationaux, régionaux et internationaux), les enjeux internationaux et géopolitiques de la construction de groupes comme les « chrétiens d'Orient », ainsi que les conséquences et les dangers que certaines initiatives politiques mises en œuvre par les gouvernements occidentaux peuvent avoir sur l'insertion des populations concernées dans leur environnement local. Il conclut en évoquant la nécessité de reconstruire la confiance au sein de la société qui doit être accompagnée par la réforme des institutions étatiques.

Le troisième et dernier chapitre, de Said Bennis, analyse la gouvernance de la diversité culturelle au Maroc et les enjeux d'une décentralisation relativement avancée. Néanmoins, à la différence des autres pays, la « minorité » au Maroc est une majorité numérique. Dès lors, la gestion de ses revendications représente un enjeu délicat. L'auteur propose des pistes de réflexion en matière de gestion de la diversité qui pourraient servir de base à une meilleure intégration des différentes composantes à de nouveaux pactes nationaux.

The Origin and Development of the Idea of "Minority" in the MENA Region: A Multilevel Analysis

Paolo Maggiolini[*]

---

*Associate Research Fellow, Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI); Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Catholic University of the S. Heart, Milan, Italy

Since the beginning of the new millennium, the socio-political history of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has dramatically accelerated under the pressure of conflicting forces at the national, regional and international levels. In this framework, the Arab uprisings can be considered a sort of political climax or rather a new "nascent state" (*statu nascenti,* as defined in psychology) during which the previous balances and hierarchies of power have been challenged, partially deconstructed and today are in the process of being progressively reorganised through the intertwining of different interests, priorities and powers. The immediate outcomes of this broad transformative process are quite controversial, with many shortcomings and ambiguities compared to the initial aspirations. The long-term results are still difficult to predict and fully understand. This is also because geopolitical tensions, foreign appetites, different and often contrasting local and national socio-political aspirations as well as pressing security concerns have unevenly coalesced and overlapped, multiplying and amplifying fragmentation and polarisation. One of the most evident results in this complex transformative phase is the entropic spread of violence, especially within the Middle East. Although it would be dishonest to ignore the fact that the present arc of conflict and coercion is equally afflicting most of these populations beyond religious or ethnic affiliations, non-Muslim and "heterodox" Muslim communities are among the victims that suffer most from this period of crisis. Concerns about minority issues in the Middle Eastern region escalated especially after the Organisation of the Islamic State (*Tanzim al-Dawla al-Islamiyya fi Iraq wa Sham*–Daesh or ISIS) sensationalised the suffering of Yazidis and Christians of Iraq, spurring hundreds of thousands of people to flee. These episodes have only further contributed to the drastic decrease of national minorities' presences within the region. In the last century, decreasing natality and the worsening of economic, political and security conditions in most of the Arab countries has brought, for example, the Christian presence from representing about 10% of the total population at the beginning of the 20th century to being 3 to 5% in today's Middle East (Connor & Hackett, 2014).

In the wake of these events and dynamics, the spotlight has turned again on the condition and status of religious minorities within MENA societies and political fields, fostering debates on their destinies between survival and inevitable emigration abroad. Nevertheless, their imperilling is indicative of a broader and deeper crisis that is involving and entangling the whole region, making the concept of minority particularly central for understanding today's political and legitimacy crisis. Precisely because of this, the present analysis aims to reconsider how the idea of minority, as a concept and institution, has been contextualised and developed in the contemporary MENA region since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and in what form it has recently re-emerged as one of the core issues of today's regional and international political concerns. First, the study seeks to deconstruct the concept of minority to define its multiple implications. An appreciation of the elasticity of this term is needed to avoid misunderstandings and abuses, directly targeting the root causes of current minority issues in the region and each country. Secondly, the analysis sketches out a short overview of the multifaceted character of today's MENA minority issues and of the multiple factors that feed these dynamics, at the historical, national, regional and transnational levels. This contextualisation is particularly important to stress the complexity of today's politically transformative dynamics in the region, avoiding culturalism and exceptionalism. Finally, the study analyses the historical correlation between minority, both as a concept and institution, state sovereignty and geopolitics in the contemporary MENA region. This intimate and structural relation has always made minority issues particularly controversial within this context and still represents one of the most robust limits to the management of diversity. In fact, majority and minority have frequently represented contested fields of rivalry for power and regional leadership rather than terms through which to consolidate true and effective citizenship based on guaranteeing both equal rights at the collective and individual levels.

The purpose of this essay is neither to suggest that the present crisis could be reduced to a simple list of various minority issues nor to critique the idea of minority per se. Similarly, although inevitably centred on the collective and community levels, the study does not intend to underrate the tension existing between individual and group dimensions and the importance of assessing such dynamics in order to fully appreciate the significance of current minority issues. Quite the contrary: since the future stability of the MENA region will inevitably be based on new understandings of most of the concepts bound to this political grammar of diversity and demography, it seems necessary to proceed in efforts to research its historical and conceptual roots as well as its normative implications and institutional adaptations in the attempt to explain why the idea of minority, both as a concept and institution, has become so pivotal again in today's regional and international politics.

The Idea of "Minority" and its Elasticity: An Overview from Today's Middle East and North Africa

Although the word "minority" – and implicitly that of "majority" – seems self-explanatory, conventionally referring to relationships between distinct units having different numeric and demographic weight within a precise territory, socio-political milieu and field, this overview departs from the conviction that this term is substantially polysemous. Minority is an elastic concept that represents both a challenge and a resource when employed. Its contextualisation and study can provide important clues to reconsidering the history of modern polity and state both at a domestic and an international level, being one of the bases for articulating contemporary hierarchies of power and dominance. At the same time, its abuse can diminish our understanding of present challenges, coalescing into a single word excessive elements and allusions with the result of creating confusions and misunderstandings or, even, accidentally legitimising new divisive conflicts and polarisation on the basis of superficial and culturalist assessments of political dynamics and interplays.

The word minority has always represented a political fact created on the basis of credibly discernible and objective numbers. Moreover, today's understanding of minorities is structurally correlated with the rise of the modern nation- or representative state (Robson, 2016). Whether thinking of minority according to the principle of democracy in its very general idea of a method of group decision with some kind of equality or referring this category to the condition of a community within a territory that is distinguished on the basis of race, ethnicity, language, religion or culture, the term minority inevitably raises questions related to positionality, temporalities, representativeness and normative-political features. The experience of communities such as Palestinians describes how the categories of minority and majority are created precisely by the changing and shifting combinations of these elements. Thinking about the history of Palestinians since the Mandate period helps us to appreciate and understand how positionality, temporalities, representativeness and normative-political features have not only determined Palestinians' struggle to affirm their own national identity at the local, regional and international levels (Khalidi, 1997) but also contributed to defining multiple experiences of being majority and minority within the land of Israel-Palestine (Haddad, McLaurin, & Nakhleh, 1979; McGahern, 2011) as well as in Jordan (Abu-Odeh, 1999; Massad, 2008), Syria (Brand, 1988), Lebanon (Peteet, 1996; Sayigh, 1995) or outside the Middle East, complicating the interplay between objective and subjective definitions of what these categories mean in their history.

Therefore, majorities and minorities are numeric articulations of power relationships and political interplays, cutting across inside-outside and vertical-horizontal lines. Their usage fulfils different and often ubiquitous descriptive and organisational functions. The definition of what is a majority depends on the presence and existence of a minority and vice-versa (Bengio & Ben-Dor, 1999). These categories are thus relational and processual per se, evolving and transforming over time because products of intra- and inter-subjective as well as of objective and normative hierarchical power relations (Longva

& Roald, 2012, p. 5; Savelsberg & Gorgas, 2017). Their usage can convey multiple meanings, not necessarily concordant, but still with common and general references to the spheres of power, authority and legitimacy.

According to its more conventional understanding, the word "minority" has been used to describe one of the outcomes determined by the correlation between normative and demographic/numeric facts in modern nation-states (Mahmood, 2016). It is through this association that the modern category of minority is produced both as concept and institution. In this case, majority and minority are objectively and subjectively imposed or accepted on the basis of factors and elements considered constitutive and preeminent for establishing group identities and solidarities, such as ethnolinguistic, religious and cultural features (Medda-Windischer, 2017, p. 26). However, as the idea of imagined communities explains (Anderson, 1991), the selective process of activating these features in creating group identities is much more complex and discretional than is generally conceived. Furthermore, it is profoundly affected by mediatisation and communication technologies. In fact, minorities and majorities are also products of constant mediation and reinterpretation of what should be considered original and artificial as well as objective and subjective in their identity fabrics (Buyuksarac & Glasser, 2017, p. 6).

From the perspective of the majority/nation-state, the minority is a component of society that potentially contradicts its founding tenets and, albeit numerically inferior, raises questions of integration, assimilation or management (Gellner, 1983, pp. 1-5). The importance of these questions depends on the extent to which the presence of the minority is perceived to represent a possible threat to the stability and security of the nation-state's tenets. The sole existence of the minority, or its public recognition, could be alleged to contest or undermine the national fabric. The experiences of Alevis and Kurds in modern Turkey are widely indicative of the consequences of perceiving diversity as a challenge to the national fabric. These communities suffered forms of discrimination because they were perceived as differing from the denominational and ethnic framework on which the modern homogenous Turkish fabric has been conceived. The case of the Kurds presents further complexity. Being equally dispersed between Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran and concentrated within precise regions, the Kurdish presence and its call for recognition has always raised numerous concerns and suspicions (Yavuz, 2005; Gunter, 2005). On the one hand, their concentration within circumscribed territories raised the spectre of separatism in the "host country", especially Turkey and Iraq (Ben-Dor, 1999). On the other, they frequently became targets of regional competition and geopolitical interference. The tensions between Ankara and Damascus in the 1990s regarding the development of new water barrages unexpectedly involved the Kurdish presence in Turkey, with Ankara accusing the Syrian regime of supporting the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) as a strategy to interfere with and block such projects (Olson, 1997). More recently, Turkish activism and military intervention in the Syrian Civil War can also be explained in this framework. Similarly, other cases where minority issues became heavily politicised and securitised because of the fear of separatism and irredentism are, for instance, those of Baluchistan between Pakistan and Iran or that of Khuzestan in Iran, with Saddam Hussein seeking to annex it allegedly because of its Sunni-Arab population during the 1980-1988 war (Gause, 2007).

National Minorities in the Modern MENA State

The above usages of the word minority are historically correlated to the definition of national minorities or "old minorities" and their status of protection in the inter-war period. This systematisation developed during the 19th century congresses of Vienna (1815), Paris (1856) and Berlin (1878), and was officially codified at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 (Sluglett, 2016, pp. 20-23). A national minority could be a "nation" that had not been able to "conquer" its sovereign state or that had found itself separated from its homeland, as well as groups and communities having "pre-national" identities somehow different from that of the majority/nation in which they dwell, raising questions of integration or assimilation (McLaurin, 1979, p. 4). Predominantly, this understanding of the word minority is correlated with the idea of a sort of primordial origin of group identities and the role of ethnicity in history (Hourani, 1947; Ben-Dor, 1999). In the modern Middle East, the ethnic aspect of national minorities has been mostly dismissed by laws and constitutions. Pan-nationalist movements, whether Turkish, Arab or Iranian, proved to be particularly susceptible to this issue. Ethnolinguistic diversity has been generally ignored, as in the case of the Amazigh in North Africa, or voluntary contained and confronted, as with the Kurds. But more widely and similarly to what was experienced in other contexts and regions, such as in Eastern Europe, the very category of national minorities has generally been problematic for the MENA state- and nation-building process (Shatzmiller, 2005, p. viii). The management of diversity has been frequently pursued by negation rather than inclusion (Haddad, 2014, pp. 3-4). In fact, even when minority statuses have been recognised and granted with special laws or forms of positive discrimination, such as the quota system, it was more frequently the religious factor that was taken into account under the general rhetoric of the unity of the nation and respect for the Islamic legacy.

Christian and Jewish communities have generally been given dedicated special status, while no recognition has been granted to heterodox Muslims or non-Muslim groups or beliefs not traditionally acknowledged by Islamic tradition, such as Baha'i and Yazidis. This does not mean that the guarantees to Christian communities totally protected their position in MENA public spaces but their recognition was never perceived to contradict the premise of the existence of a united nation as instead different intra-Muslim denominations.

Nevertheless, such a category has been dialogically debated and contested not only by majorities but also by various minorities in order to refrain from and resist being pointed out or isolated from the polity and the public sphere. Copts' refusal to be called a minority or, more generally, Arab Christians' dedication to Arab nationalism and Communist parties testifies to the will to be fully recognised within their polities, bypassing religious divides or internalising religious differences in order to access the national political fields on equal footings.

But there are also other examples demonstrating the complexity of the category of minority and how its elasticity can produce modular and contextually different realities. The condition of Negev Bedouin in Israel, the Bidoon in Kuwait and Bedouin tribes in Jordan clearly shows that the categories of minority and majority structurally depend on contextual and modular political articulations. The definition of the existence of a category called "Bedouin" in the Hashemite Emirate and later the Kingdom was decisive to designing a solid power relationship between the state and these communities (Massad, 2001). Bedouins in Jordan still benefit from a quota system and until the 1970s they were allowed to officially practise their customary ways of resolving legal controversies. Accordingly, although the term minority was never openly employed to describe their condition, the application of a minority framework to this sub-ethnic category produced precise consequences in terms of positionality, hierarchies and representation, drawing paths of integration, co-optation and control. The state made them the backbone of its legitimacy, while a portion of Jordanian Bedouin leaderships gained unexpected material and symbolic resources thanks to the existence of the Kingdom. In contrast, the case of the Bidoon in Kuwait explains exactly how sub-ethnic factors, such as lineages and tribalism, could be employed to divide and control for exclusion (Longva, 2000; Al-Nakib, 2014). Being one of the tribes that failed to register during the foundation of the state in Kuwait and the proclamation of its independence, the Bidoon have been encaged not only in a condition of permanent statelessness but also within a classification that defines their group identity by the negation of their rights, as this term explains: *bi-dun,* or without. Therefore, in this case normative power has created a state of marginalisation and dependence, reducing them to an invisible and ignored minority. Finally, the case of Negev Bedouin is even more controversial and difficult to summarise, embracing the whole complexity of the Israeli-Palestinian context (Meir, 1988; Yiftachel, Meir, 1998). The term "Bedouin" in this context has been progressively transformed into an autonomous quasi-ethnic minority category, defined on the basis of history, culture, territoriality, ethnicity, language, socioeconomic marginalisation, discrete integration and geopolitical factors. Therefore, their condition as a minority goes well beyond the scope of national minority. The imposition of the Bedouin category since the Mandate period forced these communities into a socioeconomically and culturally marginal status, a second-class presence by definition. First, Bedouin classification structurally detached them from Arab Palestinians and Israeli Arabs, producing an autonomous semi-ethnic category. Secondly, permanent recourse to the term Bedouin structurally associated these groups with the idea of nomadism and backwardness, both factors at odds with the concept of modern state and citizenship and thus somehow inferior. Later, their minority position became increasingly more complicated because of the Israeli-Palestinian question and today is becoming even more critical due to the security crisis in the Sinai. On the one hand, a component of this community believes it necessary to fight against use of the term Bedouin as a category in order to distance itself from this preconceived cultural bias. Prioritising Arabness could represent a strategy to partially escape from this socio-cultural prejudice, gaining parity with the rest of the Arab population living in Israel. This could also bypass their frequent association with other communities living in the Sinai, recently suspected of connivance with terrorist groups. At the same time, refusing the Bedouin category could have unexpected side effects. Losing specificity and being counted as Israeli Arabs can silence their positions and requests for special treatment in Israel because of their distinctive status as Bedouins. Therefore, the cases of the Bedouins of Jordan, Kuwait and Israel explain the modular and contextual impact that positionality, temporalities and relational factors have in minority issues and the importance of evaluating what the category of national minority means in each specific context.

Minority as a Condition and Feature

Since the foundation of the modern states and increasingly during the 20th century, the term minority came to conventionally define both the condition of fragility of demographically smaller groups and communities as well as a situation of subjugation and marginalisation determined by more instrumental groups' power and normative relations. These classifications are thus produced conveying the idea of the structural opposition between active domination (majority) and passive submission (minority) (Longva & Roald, 2012, p. 3). The aforementioned case of the Bidoon in Kuwait is indicative in this regard. According to this perspective, minority predominantly becomes a sort of synonym to describe various forms of vulnerability, discrimination, persecution or systematic exploitation, not necessarily correlated with numbers. The minority schema can be used in speaking of situations such as apartheid or authoritarian regimes as well as to describe conditions of discrimination, isolation and exclusion in politics and society involving gender and generational features. The design of mechanisms for positive discrimination dedicated to women and traditionally granted to national minorities, such as the quota system, explains how gender issues can also be reconsidered in a sociological and political minority framework. Regarding authoritarianism, the word minority is generally used to point out either the deprivation of rights imposed by a harsh regime or the oppressive rule of one community, group, clan or family over others. Autocratic or authoritarian regimes can be considered minoritarian by definition, although they usually rule by mechanisms, strategies and techniques that, fragmenting and selectively co-opting or excluding entire segments of the nation, fictitiously legitimate themselves as the ruling majority without the need to precisely correspond to demographic and socio-political conditions (Picard, 2012, p. 330). In this case, the conventional understanding and significance of the term minority totally reverses, becoming a parameter to describe the lack of legitimacy and the fierce rule of a small group over the rest of the population, thus contrary to any liberal and democratic principle.

But there are also other forms of “marginalities” and exclusions that enter this category, both as national and political/sociological minority statuses. These minorities are those not fitting into or diverging from the official definition of “minority” and “majority”, either because they do not correspond to imposed religious or ethnic parameters or because of socioeconomic discrimination and cultural bias. These ignored minorities are not only some of the so-called heterodox Muslim communities of the Middle East, such as the Alevi in Turkey or Baha’i in different countries. Like the Roma in Europe, the Dom dwelling in this region generally suffer from structural isolation for multiple reasons that range from cultural bias and socioeconomic deprivation to ignorance of their history, tradition, origins and culture (Zeidel, 2014). Equally, black people living in the Middle East and North Africa are traditionally dismissed and underrated in their specificity, excluded by the national fabric. In both cases, their marginalisation is produced by the fact that their “difference” is not even counted as a legitimate minority issue either locally, regionally or at the international level. At the same time, the case of the so-called Zabaleen (“garbage collectors”) in Cairo explains how forms of marginalisation could be determined by a combination of socioeconomic, cultural and religious forms of discrimination put in place both by the fellow "minority" community, namely the Egyptian Christians with whom they share the same faith, and by the majority, the rest of the Egyptian Muslim population (Kuppinger, 2014). Similarly, beyond the enduring state of conflict with Palestinians, the case of Mizrahi Jews in Israel offers another example of isolation and marginalisation on the basis of a combination of cultural stereotypes supported and perpetrated by the majority (Yiftachel & Meir, 1998).

The Minoritisation Process and its Multiple Implications

Whether political, cultural, normative, religious, ethnic, socioeconomic or clan-familial, the conditions that foster marginalisation or exclusion give rise to a process of "minoritisation"; in other words, they cast a group, community or a stratum of the population into a structurally inferior (minority) condition. But "minoritisation" can also be used to describe the dynamic that spurs a specific group or community to advocate for its rights as a "minority". This makes the word minority particularly elastic and ubiquitous. As an institution, the term minority refers to the need for special recognition, protections and guarantees for distinct, recognisable ethnolinguistic, cultural or religious communities. This is the conventional understanding of the term minority, to which corresponds a precise history of the codification of collective rights and status of protection in international law from the League of Nations (LoN) to the more recent United Nations Minorities Declaration of 1992 (Ghanea, 2008, p. 304; Mahmood, 2012, p. 427). As a concept and principle, it describes different conditions of subjugation and abuse either suffered or imposed, embracing both "victims" and "perpetrators". At the same time, both possible interpretations and usages remain somehow connected to one of the parameters that originally produced the concept of national minority, namely residence and recognisable historical attachment to a land and a region. However, in times of mass migrations, either for security or for political, economic and climatic reasons, this exclusionary attachment between minority and territoriality may need to be revised and developed in order to embrace new minority conditions or processes of "minority building" (Medda-Windischer, 2017). The growth of new communities of inhabitants and labourers often at the margins of their new "homelands" could in future raise new minority questions, presently much ignored. From our perspective, these phenomena do not only involve Europe and the West at large. In today's MENA region the number of Asian and African individuals working in the region, both in the Near East and the Gulf, is already raising big issues in terms of socioeconomic, cultural, religious and political as well as collective and individual rights (Jureidini, 2005). This does not suggest forcibly including such experiences within the minority domain but it does raise questions about the need to differentiate these cases from group and community levels.

Therefore, the quality of any condition and/or status of vulnerability should not be considered as simply predicated on numbers but needs to be contextualised and researched in depth, case by case from the perspectives of both the categories of majority and minority. When applied without a precise contextualisation, the term minority tends to an over-generalisation on the basis of an implicit and unquestionable distribution of values between "victims" and "persecutors". On the one hand, although "minoritising" the marginalised, isolated or persecuted seems giving voice to communities forced into a state of deprivation, it frequently revives old suspicions and culturalist approaches. For example, the tendency to elevate ethnicity and religious factors to the only lens through which to explain today's MENA politics recurrently reifies the actors and subjects analysed, reproducing an image of the region and its population as unchangeable entities (Pfostl & Kymlicka, 2014, p. 56), objectively discernible on the basis of their "pre-modern" and "sub-national" identities that only requires the application of coherent and fixed political solutions that – incidentally – have not yet been adopted. The MENA ethno-religious mosaic becomes the source of all the crises and conflicts. The political arena is thus reorganised into compact and easily discernible groups and communities on the bases of the "religious identities" that immediately predict different political behaviours and aspirations.

On the other, lack of contextualisation and over-generalisations tend to ignore that minority discourses are also strong political and symbolic resources at the disposal of groups and communities. As seen above, minority discourse could be endorsed either by a regime in order to legitimise its rule, as recently occurred in Syria, or by a fragile group or community to promote its rights. In the latter case, a fragile community defined as a minority should not be considered to be automatically deprived of agency. These minorities are not always passive victims but often utilise different strategies to interplay with majorities, from mediation, accommodation and integration to self-empowerment, mobilisation and even the extreme choice of emigration (Longva & Roald, 2012, pp. 3-5). Therefore, they actively participate in the definition, contextualisation and development of this category. For example, while the First Coptic Conference in 1911 advanced the idea of the existence of a Coptic nation (*umma*), during the debate on the Egyptian Constitution (1922) a vast part of this community publicly refused minority discourses and a quota system based on their distinct religious affiliation to instead view their destiny in the Egyptian nation as fully part of the "majority" of the country (Mahmood, 2016, pp. 66-69). Similarly, the codification of the different communities living in modern Iraq fostered complex debate around the interpretation of the category of minority. In the 1920s the Arabic-speaking Jews of Iraq refused to be catalogued as a minority, prioritising their identification as Iraqis (Muller-Somerfeld, 2016). The Chaldean Church, instead, sought to mediate this category both to obtain full recognition in its ecclesiastical autonomy and to gain access to the Iraqi political field, promoting the entry of the Chaldean Patriarch into the senate to exert Christian influence at the elite Iraqi level (Girling, 2015, p. 15). The Chaldean Church interpreted minority status as a resource to protect the community but never to detach it from the national fabric or to make it politically marginal. Finally, Assyrians and Kurds back a totally different position, widely utilising the minority discourse to be distinctive and recognised in their respective individualities.

Indeed, the word minority is neither "neutral" nor "univocal" in its significances and implications. It inherently embraces many different analytical levels, from the normative to the institutional, political, socioeconomic, cultural and historical. This elasticity should not be confused with relativism, making the term minority always employable. As mentioned in the beginning of this overview, minority issues need to be contextualised and understood both as a process and outcome of the intertwining between positionality, temporalities, representativeness and normative-political features. It is this correlation that makes minority issues particularly present in areas such as the contemporary MENA region and for that reason, as the following section addresses, they remain a meaningful perspective from which to deconstruct the present multifaceted arc of crisis in this region.

Crisis of the State, Crisis of Minorities in the MENA Region

Today's perils for religious minorities such as Christians in Iraq and Syria or Baha'is in Iran are indicative of a broader dilemma that involves all the many expressions of being a "minority" within this wide geographical and geopolitical space. It refers to ethnic and linguistic minorities such as Kurds in Iraq, Syria and Turkey, Azeri in Iran or Amazigh in North Africa. It revives the issue of the condition of diaspora minorities like Palestinians in Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Libya and nowadays of Syrian refugees and displaced people. It sheds new light on the historical vicissitudes of ignored minorities, such as black people in countries like Tunisia, or invisible minorities, such as the stateless Bidoon in Kuwait or the Alevis in Turkey. Finally, it calls into question multiple forms of political and sociological minority statuses that have been imposed, irrespective of numbers, by various authoritarian regimes as a strategy of coercive control and domination. It is not by chance that in the space of a few years, from being considered the possible decisive stage for winning the battle for pluralism (Muasher, 2014), the Arab uprisings have come to be depicted as the catalyst for a sort of "global minority crisis in the Arab World or in the Muslim World" (Picard, 2012).

Nevertheless, the critical situation in the Middle East is neither exceptional nor unique. The region instead appears to be a "shatter belt" where a much more profound dispute is taking place, blurring the lines traditionally defining the rationales and rules of modern politics, such as majority-minority, national-transnational and rights-duties forming the basis of the principle of citizenship. This condition determines not only the structural correlation between the crisis of the state and that of minorities but also increases its complexity and multilevel character. Therefore, today's minority issues need to be assessed by contextualising the impact of different sets of factors. On the one hand, it is necessary to reconsider the interplay between the historical legacy on which contemporary Middle Eastern polities and societies developed and the logics that foster today's socio-political forms of contestations. On the other, the present crisis needs to be analysed taking into account the potential impact of transnational and worldwide phenomena on the region.

The Idea of Minority and its Contemporary Political Reception in the MENA Region

Starting with the first set of factors, national ideas of minority have proved to be problematic since the inception of the history of the modern Middle Eastern state. This has to do with how nationalism has been conceived in the region, in particular within the Turkish, Arab and Iranian spheres. At the same time, because the concept of minority entered and developed in this region through Western influence and interference, the issue of minority and its protection frequently revives old suspicions and past concerns about external influences, whether international or regional. The result of these two factors is that not only the idea but also the term minority has been generally refused and generally eliminated from official regional discourse, prioritising the usage of terms such as communities, groups, tribes or segments/components to describe socio-cultural and ethno-religious plurality but never minorities. Even today such bias towards this concept persists. The post-Saddam Iraqi Constitution offers an emblematic example of this, where the mere use of the term minority (*'aqalliyat*) in the new charter has been considered problematic and a conveyor of divisive and sectarian discourses, instead opting for components/segments (*makunat*) (Salloum, 2013, p. 13). For political and geopolitical reasons, nationalism perceived ethno-linguistic diversity as an existential threat to the legitimacy, independence and sovereignty of the modern nation-state in the region. Inter-religious diversity was generally more accounted for, although without offering stable solutions. Non-Muslim minorities were obliged to internalise their identities, benefitting from some forms of co-optation and contractual relations that guaranteed their presence under the acceptance of the Muslim majority's rule (Mahmood, 2016, p. 13). Non-Muslims' contributions to the socio-political fabric have tended to be publicly silenced and downsized, despite their involvement and participation in daily politics, the economy and society. Even the case of Lebanon shows the difficulty in finding proper and lasting solutions in this regard (Hudson, 1988). Political pluralism there emerged as the outcome of recurring acts of mediation and repartition, negotiating the margins and hierarchies of inclusion and exclusion of each community instead of producing solid paths of integration between them. Furthermore, such modus vivendi inevitably embroiled Lebanese political momentum with regional politics and geopolitics, making group identities and their political stances vulnerable to external influences. Intra-Muslim diversity, on the other hand, has been perceived as an even more complex challenge because it has been widely interpreted as potentially undermining the legitimacy of the conceived majority at the highest level (Longva & Roald, 2012, p. 16). The condition of Shia communities in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain is very explanatory in this regard as is the tense relationship between these two denominations in today's Iraq. Therefore, it is not by chance that today's intra-Muslim tensions represent one of the main factors of the region's instability, fostering securitisation, politicisation and factionalism. Sectarianisation and the Shia-Sunni divide have become the ubiquitous formula to explain such a condition (Haddad, 2011; Haddad, 2017). Indeed, the (mis)management of diversity has become quite frequently an instrument to dominate and rule or a strategy to defend and protect regimes, rather than the path through which to produce inclusion and citizenship. Today's regional instability and turbulence is reviving this trend, making minority issues tools of political polemics and sectarian mobilisation.

This condition should not be viewed from a culturalist perspective but as the collateral outcome of tensions and competitions that have been taking place within the "majoritarian" dimension since the beginning of the 20th century. Patriotism, Pan-Arabism and Political Islam, with all their diverse historical-territorial manifestations, have strenuously competed to impose often contrasting interpretations of the role of Islam in politics and the fundaments of nations and states. This made both minority and majority the instruments of geopolitical confrontations, vilifying and scapegoating differences and diversity (Haddad, 2017, p. 374). One of the most important questions is not which of the aforementioned political discourses has proven to be more respectful towards diversity and plurality but why all of them have revived minority issues embodying strict and exclusionary majoritarian rule in their state- and nation-building tenets. One could argue that a distinction should be made between Political Islam and "secular" regimes. The former inextricably poses a much greater challenge to inter-religious diversity than the latter, in particular regarding the possibility of re-introducing *dhimmi* status in a more or less coherent and open way. This problem should not be ignored. In fact, Political Islam inherently shows limits in regard to how to reconcile citizenship and intra-/inter-religious diversity in society and politics. Nevertheless, it should also not be ignored that “secular” regimes have also widely re-proposed very controversial tacit pacts to minorities, demanding their unwavering loyalty at any price in exchange for their security (McCallum, 2012; Picard, 2012). Indeed, the difference between them is more related to the content and quality that produced marginalisation. Whether secular or religious, it is how nationalism’s and majoritarian rule’s logics have been interpreted and imposed by various regimes that most frequently produced selective isolation, marginalisation and exclusion (Longva & Roald, 2012, p. 11; Maggiolini & Demichelis, 2017)

Therefore, today’s minority issues appear to be the apex of a longer dynamic of recurring socio-political contestations. The crisis of the state and that of minorities is manifest in two parallel, although inevitably intertwined, dynamics. On the one hand, at the core of these crises lies a radical critique of and challenge to the modern Middle Eastern state, or rather to the entire set of values and principles on which regional polity, economy and society have been framed during the past hundred years. On the other, the Arab uprisings and the present crisis openly call into question how the idea of majority and minority has been operationalised, as well as the role and content of such categories and their multiple implications in today’s regional socio-political fields. This wide and multifaceted arc of contestation revolves around the complex attempt to re-articulate and mediate between contrasting interpretations of nation/state-centred duties and rights as well as groups’ political solidarities and identities, intersecting universalism, transnationalism and parochialism.

This phenomenon involves both majorities and national and sociological-political minorities and it has a double profile. First, it directly challenges how political regimes and states have imposed their categories and logics in recent decades. Despite the inevitable shortcomings and ambiguities of any transformative process, the people amassing in the squares and streets of Tunis, Cairo, Manama, Damascus, Sanaa, Tripoli and of the other numerous cities and towns of this multifarious geographical space expressed the desire to subvert the past system (*nizam*) as individuals and groups aspiring to an authentic citizenship with substantive socioeconomic rights. Contestations and subversions denounced multiple forms of marginalisation and negation of socioeconomic, racial and gender rights as well as of cultural, ethnolinguistic and religious identities, which most of the regional regimes have constantly selectively manipulated in order to divide and rule. Demonstrations and protests in Tunisia demanded regime change because of suffering on the socioeconomic, moral, ethical and existential levels. Similarly, the revival in Egypt of the "Cross and the Crescent" indicated the will to bypass and publicly denounce community discourses imposed from within as well as the sectarian exploitation orchestrated by the Mubarak regime.

Secondly, in the wake of the Arab uprisings, minority issues revived through the revitalisation of internal debates within different groups and communities concerning the desirability and opportunity of acting and advocating for "minority rights" within a given polity and society as well as on the international level. In fact, today's minority issues also call into question the realm of subjectivities, group solidarities and intra-community relations regarding how best to obtain their right to be "different". Majorities and minorities are not only produced from above as the reflection of increasingly centralised, nationalised and majoritarian modern states (Robson, 2016). They are also imagined, fashioned, accepted or opposed from within and in regard to other communities, groups and society at large. Therefore, these categories are inevitably produced by the intertwining between intra- and inter horizontal-vertical relations. Focusing on the religious and ethnic dimensions, the case of Iraq is very representative of the tensions that permeate and cut across the categories of minority and majority (Zubaida, 2002). Today, a component of the Iraqi Christian presence is increasingly demanding to be recognised as a distinct ethno-national community according to the Assyrian-Chaldean-Syriac framework. This position expresses the will to bypass intra-Christian division under a common ethnolinguistic category (Salloum, 2013, p. 11). Moreover, it also considers it necessary to achieve forms of recognition with territorial implications, as the Nineveh plan would suggest. This project has also attracted an increasing number of supporters among the Yazidis, especially after 2014 Daesh's massacres in Sinjar. Against this backdrop, another portion of Iraqi Christians demands full citizenship in the Iraqi state, stressing the importance of the unity of the nation and the need to fully realise the promise of equality and religious freedom. According to this vision, being a religious minority should not play against either the ideal of a united Iraqi nation or the specific rights of the non-Muslim presence in the country. At the same time, communities that never benefitted from positive forms of discrimination, such as the Sabians-Mandaeans, mediate between these two positions, demanding full recognition and guarantees as citizens but also as a distinct minority needing special protection and public recognition. In the meantime, Arab Sunnis and Shiites are embroiled in a complex struggle for redefining the balances of power within the state and the nation, elevating sectarian identities to new sources of legitimacy, mobilisation and political activism, while Kurds seem uncompromisingly dedicated to gaining their independence. How to reconcile such different approaches and positions is part of today's minority crises and challenges to pluralism. These issues structurally refer to the spheres of the relationship between normative power and demographic-social weight as well as the relation between individuals, groups and communities in a time of profound disaggregation and re-composition of the old social and cultural order. Similarly, the intra-Coptic debate in Egypt confirms the tensions existing between opposing subjective interpretations of what constitutes the community and what its destiny should be within the nation and the state. On the one hand, some Copts view themselves as a national minority. This interpretation developed from translating and reconfiguring the distinctive Coptic religious character into an autonomous ethnic category (Mahmood, 2016). On the other, a vast part of the community continues to refuse this discourse, reviving its traditional rebuttal of minority grammar as being divisive and detrimental to the status of a presence considered to be the original voice of historic Egypt and therefore never a minority by definition. Such internal tension became even more multifaceted after the Tahrir Revolution, the election of Muhammad Morsi as president and his ousting by a military apparatus legitimated by vast popular support. These events have complicated the notions of political majority and minority as well as the significance of majoritarian rule, encaging Egypt in a difficult transition. Finally, the situation of the Amazigh in North Africa shows that their demand for public and institutional recognition goes well beyond the minority framework and expresses the will to be officially counted as equal partners of the national fabric (Bergh & Rossi-Doria, 2015).

The Impact of Transnational and Worldwide Dynamics on MENA Minority Issues

As pointed out by the dynamics analysed above, minority issues and challenges to the management of diversity cannot be fully deconstructed without taking into account their modularity, contextual profile and inherent correlation with hierarchies of power and domination at the local-community, national and international levels. Regarding this last aspect, today's MENA minority issues are becoming particularly critical because of the impact of specific transnational and global dynamics that are variously influencing regional politics. Although inevitably intertwined and frequently part of the same macro-political processes, these dynamics can be divided into two abstract clusters. The first cluster pertains to phenomena that immediately led to MENA regional politics and the different balances of power within each state. The second relates to wider historical processes and dynamics that, although developing outside and independently from the vicissitudes that are targeting this region, exert immediate influence on today's MENA politics, increasing the number of political variables and factors that concur, shaping and affecting minority issues and their understanding.

In the first cluster, one can find radical militant Islamism (Jihadism) and Saudi-Iranian geopolitical competition. Both phenomena foster and play with the transnational politicisation of religious identities. Although explicitly refusing to acknowledge, or showing no interest in, minority-majority categories, Islamic radical militant groups, generally labelled as Jihadist, manipulate the feelings of disfranchisement and desire for revenge of marginalised Muslims within the region and in the West to mobilise support and destabilise the political order, envisioning the foundation of a new polity based on a precise exclusionary idea of sameness and diversity (Plebani & Maggiolini, 2015). They describe themselves as saviours and an enlightened minority that seeks to eradicate the rule of the false “majority-minority” in power, releasing the dominated majority and the whole *umma.* On the other, Saudi-Iranian geopolitical competition feeds sectarian polarisation with the aim of reverting to or blocking the revision of traditional balances of power within different Arab states (Matthiesen, 2013) from Bahrain to Yemen, Syria and Lebanon. This geopolitical competition is manipulating feelings of disfranchisement and marginalisation as well as reshuffling the categories of political majority and minority. Indeed, the issue at the core of these dynamics is not whether to politicise the position and condition of a given community with a state and society. The correlation between minority issues and politics is inescapable. Rather, these dynamics revolve around how to interpret and frame the inevitable political implications that such questions pose regarding the issues of polity, statehood, citizenship and the community itself. Behind minority issues there are questions related both to coexistence and citizenship as well as to what should be considered artificial and original in the socio-political national and community fabric.

In the second cluster, one can find two important transnational and worldwide dynamics that are directly influencing today’s minority issues, namely the revived international political concern with minority status and conditions, especially if related to religious diversity, and the growing importance of new global communication technologies. Both phenomena have influenced the present phase of activation and politicisation of community identities.

Starting with the former, the fall of the Soviet Union triggered the development of a complex dynamic of reordering the world balances of power, transforming the traditional notions of intervention, security and conflict. The sense of relief generated by the end of the Cold War logics and the diminishing possibilities of a nuclear war gave new centrality to the ideal of the moral obligation to act, especially regarding cases of persecution and discrimination because of ethnic and religious beliefs. Since the 1980s, after decades of tacit distrust toward the function of the category of old or traditional national minority – due to the negative legacy of Nazi/fascist manipulation of this discourse in Europe –, the international community showed a revived interest in community status and rights, becoming a more receptive audience ready to intervene in these fields. This new concern with national minority issues has been manifested not only through the development of new humanitarian laws and NGO advocacy but also by the articulation of new strategic doctrines, such as the Responsibility to Protect. Regarding this latter aspect and despite their mixed results, non-traditional military missions such as in Kurdistan, Somalia and the Balkans provide clear examples. Against this potentially positive backdrop for many ignored and marginalised national minorities to gain unexpected international support for their cause, this historical dynamic has proved to be quite controversial in its concrete effects. From a theoretical level, the assimilation of minority grammar into the non-traditional military intervention framework has not only favoured the development of a new holistic understanding of security issues more centred on the human level (human security), embracing both the individual and collective dimensions of human beings, but it has also increased the risks of securitising minority issues, establishing a new structural correlation between them and foreign humanitarian-military intervention. The revived rhetoric of the moral obligation to act seems to have partially resuscitated the traditional 19th century perception that minority issues exist only within precise geopolitical spaces, namely external to the West. This can foster new suspicions of promoting the protection and defence of selected national minorities for mainly political purposes (Fox, 2013, p. 454) or to making their conditions subject to mere power relations between states and the international community. Such concerns are particularly felt in the Middle East, where the protection of minorities has been historically linked to Western intervention. At the same time, the effectiveness of these interventions has widely proved ineffective in solving minority issues on the ground. Most of the non-traditional military interventions have failed the post-conflict challenge. They have proven incapable of activating and sustaining the nation- and state-building processes necessary to directly tackle the root causes that produce minority issues and crises. In the most positive cases, these military interventions have solved the emergency but crystallised the crisis. In the worst experiences, they have only introduced new political variables to the ongoing conflicts without blocking the stream of refugees pouring out from the war zones. Minority issues and crises cannot be resolved only by employing the military. As seen above, politics and states are the fields where they should be assessed and tackled.

Regarding worldwide and transnational dynamics, globalisation and the Internet have contributed to reshuffling the realm of identity and self-consciousness, backing the revival and transformation of group and community solidarities by easing the interaction between homelands, diasporas and transnational networks. By providing support and backing to homeland communities in crisis, diasporas exert an important influence on minority issues, directly influencing the way of interpreting community identities and framing the root causes of their peril (Longva & Roald, 2012, p. 16). Diasporas generally help the homeland community to reach out to possible external support, especially from their host country. The presence of a powerful diaspora could be decisive in making the existence of a minority issue emerge in a specific country, while the lack of one could confine groups and communities equally persecuted in a position of anonymity and irrelevance. This situation inevitably increases the entanglement between the "national" and "transnational" aspects of such a question. Nevertheless, the outcome of such a relationship could result in a paradox. Instead of liberating and unveiling the root causes of crises and dangers, such entanglement frequently risks producing new hierarchies of power, especially within the dimension of the community, making the category of minority and the principle of minority protection even more contested. The diaspora not only appears more prone to framing its discourse in terms of a persecuted or marginalised minority on the basis of its own experience of abuse, dispossession and emigration but, because the diaspora is also more capable of lobbying in its host country and at international fora, it frequently tends to impose a minority discourse on the rest of the community still living in the homeland, beyond demographic and normative factors and their contextual political implications. The local community could, thus, find itself in a difficult position. On the one hand, it could be incentivised to embrace the diaspora's discourse to benefit from its economic assistance and international visibility, partially recovering from a difficult situation through these unexpected resources. On the other, such a move could further jeopardise its position at home, experiencing new forms of political marginalisation and isolation. Therefore, this condition presents to the local community the challenge of a double mediation: with the state power and the majority to prove its loyalty and to advocate for better protection and representation as full citizens but also with its diaspora in order to mediate and contextualise their aid and backing according to local conditions. This entanglement between transnational and global is making the reality of identity production and minority issues increasingly glocal and transnational, becoming one of the factors that explain today's minority issues within the region. As mentioned above, the cases of the Christian Iraqi community and partially that of Copts in Egypt offer many insights in this regard.

The ongoing regional turbulence confirms that minority issues in the Middle East have re-emerged, inextricably entangling again with the spheres of sovereignty, geopolitics and identity production. This is neither exceptional nor singular but, as the following section will analyse, is an outcome determined by the precise historical legacy of how secularity and modernity have been contextualised in regional politics.

Modern MENA States and Minority Issues: The Entanglement between Geopolitics and Sovereignty

The study of the historical correlation between minority frameworks, state sovereignty and geopolitics is essential in order to deconstruct the root causes that make minority issues an important factor of the present crisis in the region. This is the natural conclusion and necessary final focus of this work. Their association essentially refers to the foundation of the modern nation- or representative state: how it has been conceived and developed globally as well as contextualised locally. On the one hand, this association is inscribed in the history of the modern nation-state as a globalised socio-cultural, political and economic phenomenon. On the other, beyond culturalist explanations or reductionist accounts of minority issues that simply look at colonial legacies, it pertains to the specific historical and socio-cultural background on which the ideal of the modern nation-state has been introduced, contextualised and developed. Whether focusing on the political implications of the processual relationship between majority and minority or on the various elements that contribute to establishing these classifications, the foundation of the modern nation-states not only determines and imposes such categories but also structurally requires the accomplishment of this normative procedure. In fact, the modern state imposed normative practices of standardisation, homogenisation and integration as well as differentiation, heterogenisation and seclusion.

Accordingly, before looking at the historical background, three spheres need to be deconstructed in order to unravel the relationship between minority issues, sovereignty and geopolitics in the MENA region.

The Promises of the Modern Nation-State and the MENA Region

The development of the modern category of minority is structurally correlated with the promises of modern secular politics and modern nation-states to disentangle politics from religion (Mahmood, 2016, pp. 8-9). By maintaining the separation between Church and state and relegating religion to the private sphere, modern secular politics structurally reformulated the category of religion. The state regulated what religion ought to be, embedding religious factors within social life. The privatisation of religion was considered essential to fulfilling the promise of civil and political equality. Nevertheless, this operation resulted in a paradox. In appearance, modern secular politics solved the problem of depoliticising religion by privatising it. In reality, by bringing religious life under the control of the state, it structurally entangled their destinies. Religious inequalities and identities were transformed and became progressively associated with the spheres of civil and social rights. The state became the sole authentic reference for any claims pertaining to religious identities and inequality. By generating new spheres and boundaries for religion, the state also institutionalised and re-shaped the subjects legitimised to represent and define how religious identities and differences should be experienced, recognised or contested within the community sphere and in relation to polity and society. This operation paradoxically increased the political content of religious issues and it intermingled the religious and the secular.

The history of the state-building process in the Middle East largely explains one of the possible modular or contextual implementations of these inherent tensions between politics and religion as well as between private and public. Although modern Middle Eastern states recognised the principle of equality within their constitutions, most of them were founded on the parallel operation of circumscribing religious factors to the private domain and recognising Islam as essential to the identity and the formation of the "nation" and the state. This immediately reformulated religious differences according to the new grammar of citizenship and nationalism, inherently defining majorities and minorities according to hierarchised religious affiliations as well as their respective places in regard to the state and society. Most of the modern Middle Eastern states fulfilled the promise of privatising religion, circumscribing the impact of religious affiliations to the spheres of family laws that should be regulated according to citizens' distinct religious affiliations and traditions (Mahmood, 2016, p. 115). This transformation was realised by giving religious communities the right to create and maintain their own institutions. By assuming responsibility for governing the family and personal affairs of their members, the existing religious communities and their leaderships were thus integrated into the state's administrative system and reformulated according its parameters (Maggiolini, 2016). At the same time, the constitutional recognition of Islam as essential to the formation of the nation and the state imposed on non-Muslims another level of privatisation, complicating their position in regard to the private-public continuum and national identity fabric. This situation infused multiple political significances into non-Muslims' "minority" status. The state imposed itself as the sole actor legitimated to regulate the inherent tension between private and public as well as between majority and minority. At the same time, the combination of the privatisation of inter-religious diversity and nationalisation of Islam ethnicised and communitarised religious factors, increasing their impact on political identity spheres. The institutionalisation and recognition varied in each state on the basis of regional traditions, local balances of power and external influences. For example, while for modern Turkey the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) recognised only non-Muslim communities already institutionalised at time of the Ottomans, in Syria, the French expanded the scope of recognition to communities such as the Alawites and Druze that had never been subject to such provisions, giving them a territorial space (White, 2012).

Paradoxically, while the modern state was experiencing its centralising growth parabola, the promises of separation between private and public, depoliticisation of religious factors and assimilation/integration of diversity seemed somehow possible. Ethno-religious minority issues were always present but the aforementioned tensions seemed workable. Nevertheless, from the late 1970s modern nation-states began reformulating their positions. On the one hand, the state began to retreat from society and the economy, subcontracting to social actors an increasing part of its past prerogatives and activities. In the Middle East, where the vast majority of the economies are rentier, this move progressively exacerbated exchanges of loyalties for symbolic and material capitals, empowering identity and community channels (Picard, 2012, p. 335). In particular, the crisis of old nationalist guards and the post-Mandate state allowed the religious dimension to re-emerge thanks to its better capacity to comply with the socioeconomic needs of the many marginalities still dwelling on the fringes of Middle Eastern societies. On the other, in the wake of the Iranian Revolution most of the Middle Eastern regimes increasingly returned to investing in the religious-cultural sector, securitising it to find new legitimacy and protect regimes in power (Longva & Roald, 2012). For example, in a country generally considered to be ruled by an inherently secular regime such as Ba'athist Syria, the 1973 Constitution reintroduced the dictum that the president should be Muslim (art. 3.1) and proclaimed Islamic jurisprudence as the main source of legislation (art. 3.2). These provisions were confirmed again by the 2012 constitutional reforms (Farha & Mousa, 2015, p. 9). The combination of retreat from socioeconomic fields and investment in religious symbolic capital contributed to politicising religious factors and legitimising religious leaderships (McCallum, 2010; Mahmood, 2016, p. 177). Accordingly, the return of religion since the 1970s, both in the form of Political Islam and Church leadership revival in countries like Lebanon and Egypt, could be considered one of the outcomes of this retreat or crisis of the secular nation-state and of its choice to partially subcontract its socioeconomic duties. Identity politics and sectarian polarisation also became controversial reactions to the state's growing socio-political and economic difficulty in regulating the structural incongruence between private and public, blurring the borders between national and transnational.

The Entrance of the Category of Minority in the Modern MENA Region

While the triumph of the nation-state ideal has signified the historical transformation of the state into an instrument of the nation, either according to its civic or romantic definition, the globalisation of the principle of national sovereignty has produced majorities and minorities as permanent institutions and worldwide concepts (Mahmood, 2012; Mahmood, 2016). Minorities also existed before the nation-state but their modern significance has been developed along with the modern secular state and according to the principle of nations self-conceiving themselves as limited socio-cultural units with sovereignty over specific territories and within given boundaries. Advocating the direct relationship of the citizen to the state, the nation-state established as "majority" its citizens who shared religious, linguistic and cultural traits (Arendt, 1979; Mahmood, 2012; Mahmood, 2016). Those units and groups not perfectly fitting into this classification were defined as "minority". Although recognised as equal citizens, these groups found themselves in permanent need of some laws of exception outside normal legal protection because of their diversity. The codification of specific international bodies of laws has sought to resolve such structural discrepancy with a double scope. On the one hand, it sought to mediate this internal tension to protect the integrity and stability of the nation-state from any possible internal challenge and external interference leveraging minority issues. On the other, it aimed to achieve this objective by implementing positive discrimination mechanisms able to guarantee the existence of national minorities. Such a concern dates back to the 17th century when, with the Peace of Westphalia, the principle of "non-intervention" was imposed along with the right of the "prince" to determine the religion of his state and people. Accordingly, modern sovereignty has been founded precisely on this politicisation of religious affiliations and the simultaneous attempt to prevent any possible exploitation of religion against the polity and the state from within and outside. This has inevitably intertwined and entangled minority issues with the spheres of national sovereignty and of the international system. During the 19th century apogee of European power, these logics found a very controversial implementation through humanitarian law. In other words, the Western world embedded minority frameworks within its civilising mission schema, holding these principles valid only for non-Western areas and manipulating them to interfere in various territories. The Ottoman reforms in favour of non-Muslim subjects "suggested" to Istanbul at the Paris Conference after the Crimean War and the French military intervention in the 1860 Lebanese Civil War are two significant examples (Fawaz, 1993). Later on, such logics and principles were structurally established as a parameter of the international system with the Minority Treaties at the end of the First World War when the LoN merged religious and national rights into the triad "racial, religious and linguistic protection" (Müller-Somerfeld, 2016, p. 264). The LoN established the first codification and definition of national minorities, developing a system of minority treaties, asserting that legal provisions concerning the status of national minorities could not be altered or amended without the consent of Geneva and, finally, granting national minorities the right to petition it in case of violation and discrimination. These systems and mechanisms were designed to regulate national minority issues in Central and Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, they entered the Middle East via the Mandate or on request for recognition of the independence of a newly-founded state. They became sources of inspiration for the newly-established states through the commitments undertaken by the Mandate Powers of France and Great Britain when they accepted the Mandate. For example, the Mandate for Palestine text, binding also for Transjordan, adopted the minority framework in articles 15 and 18, pertaining to the right to religious belief, the right to manage private schools for each community and, finally, the principle of equality for all citizens. Therefore, these legal principles legitimised London's strategies for local diversity management. In the land of Palestine, the British authorities granted full institutional recognition to the Jewish-Zionist presence based on their distinctive national and ethno-religious character, while dividing the Arab population according to its sectarian composition. Arab Christians saw the institutionalisation of their religious communities, while Arab Muslims were allowed to create the Supreme Muslim Council. The same happened with France in Syria and Lebanon, where Paris intensively contributed to reshuffling local balances of power as well as the spheres and borders between the communities dwelling in these territories on the basis of its administrative and colonial strategy developed in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia (White, 2012). Paris promoted the creation of Greater Lebanon, detaching part of historical Syria and uniting it with Mount Lebanon. At the same time, French Mandate authorities dictated the subdivision of Syria into different political units with two autonomous regions for Alwaites and Druzes. Also at the same time, these principles and logics were directly imposed on newly-founded states such as Turkey with the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) or the Hashemite Kingdom of Iraq with the Declaration of Guarantees (1932).

Minority Status and Political Systems in the MENA Region

After the analysis of the historical correlation between the nation-state's ideal and the category of minority, the study of minority status needs to deal with the level of impact of constitutional choice (Picard, 2012, p. 326). By opting for forms of government inspired by demographic/majoritarian rule (Tocqueville, 1969; Picard, 2012, p. 326), namely most of the modern Middle East states, or consensus/minoritarian democracy (Lijphart, 1999; Picard, 2012, p. 326), like Lebanon, has had a profound impact on defining the traits and hierarchies of what majorities and minorities are in a given political system. This also holds true for authoritarian and hybrid regimes, despite the fact that by imposing forced consensus they seem to make the conventional categories of minorities and majorities meaningless (Copeaux, 2000; Picard, 2012). Regimes such as that of Bashar al-Assad and the Alawites in Syria show a sophisticated ability to manipulate and selectively co-opt group solidarities and inter-community distrust. The cases of Bahrain's Sunni regime and Saddam's Iraq provided other examples of how authoritarian regimes create and determine majority-minority divides by dominating from above. Similarly, while being more the expression of the rule of a small familial and clannish elite than of a community or specific denomination, Ben Ali's Tunisia offers other evidence in this regard. These cases are not simply compact minorities that effectively manage power and the state according to shared group or community interests. Rather, such regimes impose "majoritarian" rule selecting, manipulating, co-opting and excluding demographic and social factors. It is the authoritarian attribute of the regime that fabricates what is a minority, establishing where and how the minority issues stand. Similarly, Middle Eastern regimes increasingly described through the idea of hybridism, such as the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan with its traditionally reported intra-national cleavage between

Transjordanians and Palestinians, could also present a very nuanced and complex situation of how minority issues can emerge and develop (Massad, 2001; Massad, 2008). In such cases, a political minority is created through the manipulation of the "national" and "ethnic" and not because of them, as well as in reaction to a competing nationalist movement and complex geopolitical conditions.

Minorities in the MENA Region: The Entanglement between Sovereignty and Geopolitics

After assessing the role of the modern state in determining majority and minority classification, the analysis of the correlation between modern nation-states and minority issues and their entanglement with geopolitics should reconsider the specific historical and socio-cultural background on which these dynamics and relationships have been contextualised and developed. The road to the modern minority-majority divide proceeded in a historical situation changing from different local forms of dynastic rule (such as the Ottoman Empire) to European colonial domination to the formation of distinct nation-states and new regional balances of power.

Looking into the history of today's MENA region, some of the elements that have contributed to the development of the modern idea of minority refer to the traditional Islamic mechanisms through which the state justified the existence of communities different from Muslim under its sovereignty and authority. This mechanism was the *dhimma* that granted "protection" to the people of the recognised revealed religions (Christians, Jews, Sabians and later Zoroastrians, Hindus and Buddhists) dwelling within the Islamic state in exchange for their acknowledgment of the domination of Islam. The Islamic state never thought of diversity in terms of majority and minorities (*'aqalliyat*). The processual relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims developed according to a political cosmology that conceived inequality as natural and political. This unchangeable situation was determined by religious factors and should be controlled and regulated by the government (Furman, 2000, p. 2). Assimilation and integration were not perceived as necessary, while toleration testified to the efficacy of the mechanism devised. In fact, the Islamic state disposed of legal instruments to permit the coexistence of different socio-religious units and groups (*ta'ifa*) (Longva & Roald, 2012).

In this framework, focusing on today's Middle East and specifically on the territories once part of the Ottoman Empire, Istanbul not only endorsed the traditional Islamic *dhimma* principle and logic but designed its specific administrative system, structure and set of institutions to deal with the diversity over which it ruled, traditionally called the *millet* system. Whether it is historically correct to refer to the existence of such a scheme before the end of the 18th century, it is on this background that during the 19th century Istanbul evolved a more uniform and systemic set of norms defining the modern Ottoman idea of religious communities (*ta'ifa diniyya*) and, at the same time, introduced the principle of equality within the Empire (Hatti-i Humayum 1856). Whether considering the pre-modern *millet* arrangement or its 19th century outline, it is important to point out that this system still did not endorse a quantitative understanding of inequality and diversity within the Empire. This quantitative and numeric approach toward demography progressively entered the Ottoman political field through the parallel development of the principle of modern representation (the constitutional experiment in 1876 and before the Vilayet reforms of 1864) and the rise of multiple secessionist and nationalist movements that progressively cast religious factors in ethno-national terms (Karpat, 1982; Kitromilides, 2007). But it was the increasing interference of Western powers that made these dynamics particularly controversial. In fact, in the late 18th century, the issue of protecting non-Muslim Ottoman communities became a contested field that Western powers manipulated in order to interfere with the Empire (Van den Boogert, 2012). Therefore, while minority rights were introduced in the Western context as necessary guarantees for modern statehood, they entered the Ottoman field as a source of desegregation and contestation of Istanbul's authority and legitimacy from outside and within. This perfectly coupled with the development of different nationalist movements within the Empire that made the religious dimension one of the first fields within which to imagine new and alternative polities and political identities. Later, when Istanbul's empire collapsed at the end of the First World War, the modern idea of national minority (*'aqalliyat*) and its framework were adopted in the constitutions of most of the modern Middle Eastern states. At this point, the institution of minority was contextualised. It became politically salient both as part of the state- and nation-building process in the Middle East and as the indirect raison d'être of Western presences through the Mandates and their mission to following through state-building processes in the region. This entanglement established the controversial legacy on which later, during the late 1940s and 1950s, the post-colonial state in the Middle East won its independence. Minority issues became a sphere within which to affirm independence from and sovereignty over the past colonial dominance that, while in many contexts short in time, left an evident psychological impact and the impression that minority issues were simply part of a colonial legacy. This approach to minority issues became even more controversial for two sets of reasons. First, most of the Middle Eastern countries specifically seized their independence by violent means or coups d'état against local balances of power and modus vivendi instead of through authentic national movements of liberation against the external power. This had a profound impact on the conceptualisation of majority rule, blurred the borders between civic and military power and contributed to associating minority issues with the colonial past, feeding suspicions towards several minority groups implicitly charged with having collaborated with the external colonial powers. Secondly, after the Second World War and Nazi/fascist manipulation of minority issues in Europe (Ghanea, 2008), minority issues disappeared from international concern and political vocabulary, prioritising individual rights over collective and group claims. The idea was that these issues could have been easily by-passed and progressively resolved through the assimilation of diversity by means of building strong independent and sovereign states. The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) clearly confirmed this idea. Anti-colonial movements further supported such understanding, stressing the importance of unity and homogeneity against any kind of possible internal division, perceived as the outcome and product of colonial divide and rule (McLaurin, 1979, p. 5). In the Middle East, a number of regimes fully manifested these visions. In Syria, Colonel Shishakli publicly supported the need to eliminate the religious minorities' reserved seats in parliament as the sole guarantee of developing a truly secular regime in the country (Picard, 2012). The Baath in Syria and Iraq worked to depoliticise the role of religious affiliations and religious leaders with the aim of imposing itself as the sole reference in charge of managing political participation in the country. For example, Syrian Christians entered cabinets, assemblies and public administration on the basis of their relationship with the Baath party, assuming particular duties within areas where they were particularly concentrated. Such a modus vivendi did not change after Hafiz al-Assad seized power in the country (Rabo, 2012). The al-Assad regime sought to force its own idea of Arab nationalism on the basis of cultural affinity rather than ethnic kinship, with the aim of quelling sub-national identities and manipulating minority issues according to Baathist regime interests. The same dynamic has also manifested in Iraq since the coup d'état of July 1958 against the Hashemite monarchy, first, during Abd al-Karim Qasim's regime and, after, since Saddam Hussein's accession to power (Rassam, 2006, pp. 147-148; Donabed, 2015, pp. 148-150). Finally, even in a case where minority issues are generally perceived to be less problematic or controversial, such as the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, in 1951 Amman replied to a UNESCO subcommittee on minority issues stating that in the country there were no minorities, all were Jordanians and equal before the law, whatever distinct historical, religious or ethnic character they may present (Patai, 2015, p. 22).

From the late 1970s and increasingly after the fall of the Soviet Union, the interest in minorities has constantly increased (Picard, 2012, p. 339). On the one hand, this development produced positive outcomes like the United Nations Minorities Declaration of 1992. This new appreciation of the importance of minority issues partially corrects some of the past contradictions and it is a positive contribution to better pinpointing the root causes of much of the present crisis. On the other, this revived concentration is still far from being effectively operationalised. The North American-led military interventions in Iraq in 1991 and 2003 revealed a structural incapacity to promote minority rights and devise balanced mechanisms to manage diversity. Not only have both the majoritarian and consensus models failed in post-conflict scenarios but external intervention has generally fuelled sectarian competition. The increasing ineffectiveness of international actors has also progressively allowed regional powers to emerge and to vie for supremacy in the Middle East. This has further complicated the Middle East's geopolitical framework, making minorities the instruments of external influence or the scapegoats of these rivalries. The current intra-Sunni antagonism between Saudi Arabia and Qatar as well as the intra-Muslim rivalry between Tehran and Riyadh are in part responsible for this situation. On the other, the regimes in power have largely continued to manipulate minority communities' existences, conditioning their security and stability in exchange for loyalty and deference. Accordingly, the emergence of Political Islam and terrorist challenges have largely played in favour of the regimes in power. Given the concerns that these ideologies raised in most non-Muslim communities, most of the Arab regimes securitised the religious sphere and society at large, establishing new authoritarian pacts, confining non-Muslim minorities as well as the Muslim majority to a permanent state of control.

Conclusion

Looking back into the contemporary history of the region, one finds that MENA states' systems and their development have been widely framed on the selective reception, institutionalisation or negation of the idea of minority, as a function of a modern state's existence and sovereignty against any possible internal and external geopolitical interference. As seen above, this is not exceptional but part of a wider worldwide phenomenon that pertains to the history of nationalism and nation-states. Nevertheless, in the contemporary history of the MENA region the issue of "minority" has always been pivotal when the geopolitical and political dispute had the "state", its "identity" and sovereignty as its core objective and goal. Today's arc of crisis confirms this trend. The issue of the survival of "minorities" and consequently of their protection does not represent one of the proofs of the inescapable confrontation between Islam and Christianity or the intrinsic intolerance of the former toward any form of diversity. Equally, the intra-Muslim conflict between Sunnis and Shiites, described with the term "sectarianism", is not simply reducible to a millennial antagonism that goes back to the origin of this faith. Rather, they are products of active political strategies, projects and agendas based on activating and re-orienting identities. Behind these dynamics a much more complex dispute is developing at the local, regional and international levels, which makes religious and ethnic factors important as political facts through which to promote alternative and often conflicting ideas of "polity", "society" and "state". This makes the issue of "minority" pivotal again as an intellectual, normative and political concept to disaggregate and reorganise communities, establishing precise hierarchies of power as well as new "minorities" and "majorities". Deconstructing minority and majority discourses is necessary in order to resist today's temptation to "essentialise" the MENA region. Minorities cannot simply be considered victims, silencing or ignoring their agency and specific requests. At the same time, religious identities and sectarianisation cannot be considered both the inescapable destiny of this wide geographical space and the most authentic expression of its culture and tradition. The present crossroads can be successfully negotiated only by eradicating the old nationalist logics and frameworks as well as the compromises and rationales imposed both by local actors and regional and international powers that used the categories of majority and minority as tools to dominate and securitise instead of as classifications for extending authentic citizenship.

References

Abu-Odeh, A. (1999). *Jordanians, Palestinians & the Hashemite Kingdom in the Middle East peace process.* Washington: United States Institute of Peace.

Al-Nakib, F. (2014). Revisiting a ar and Bad in Kuwait: Citizenship, housing, and the construction of a dichotomy. *International Journal of Middle East Studies, 46* (1). Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743813001268

Anderson, B. (1991). *Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism.* London, New York: Verso. doi: 10.2307/1858850

Arendt, H. (1979). *The origins of totalitarianism.* London: Harcourt, Brace & World.

Ben-Dor, G. (1999). Minorities in the Middle East: Theory and practice. In O. Bengio & G. Ben-Dor (Eds.), *Minorities and the state in the Arab world* (pp. 1-29). Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Bengio, O., & Ben-Dor, G. (Eds.). (1999). *Minorities and the state in the Arab world.* Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Bergh, S.I., & Rossi-Doria, D. (2015). Plus ça change? Observing the dynamics of Morocco's 'Arab spring' in the high atlas. *Arab Spring and Peripheries. Mediterranean Politics,* 20 (2). Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2015.1033900

Brand, L. (1988). Palestinians in Syria: *The politics of integration. Middle East Journal,* 42 (4).

Büÿüksaraç, G.B., & Glasser, J. (2017). Inhabiting the margins: Middle Eastern minorities revisited. *Anthropological Quarterly,* 90 (1). doi: 10.1353/anq.2017.0000

Connor, P., & Hackett, C. (2014, May 19). Middle East's Christian population in flux as Pope Francis visits holy land. *Pew Research Center.* Retrieved from http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/05/19/middle-easts-christian-population-in-flux-as-pope-francis-visits-holy-land/

Copeaux, E. (2000). Le consensus obligatoire. In I. Rigoni (Ed.), *Turquie: Les mille visages. Politique, religion, femmes, immigration* (pp. 89-104). Paris: Syllepse.

Donabed, S. (2015). *Reforging a forgotten history: Iraq and the Assyrians in the twentieth century.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Farha, M., & Mousa, S. (2015). Secular autocracy vs. sectarian democracy? Weighing reasons for Christian support for regime transition in Syria and Egypt. *Mediterranean Politics, 20* (2). Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2015.1033903

Fawaz, L. (1993). *An occasion for war: Civil conflict in Lebanon and Damascus in 1860.* Oxford, London: Centre for Lebanese Studies, I B Tauris & Co Ltd.

Fox, J. (2013). Religious discrimination against religious minorities in Middle Eastern Muslim states. *Civil Wars,* 15 (4). Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/13698249.2013.853413

Furman, U. (2000, October). Minorities in contemporary Islamist discourse. *Middle Eastern Studies,* 36 (4). Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/00263200008701329

Gause, F.G. III (2007). Threats and threat perceptions in the Persian Gulf region. *Middle East Policy,* 14 (2). doi: 10.1111/j.1475-4967.2007.00302.x

Gellner, E. (1983). *Nations and nationalism.* Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.

Ghanea, N. (2008). Religious or minority? Examining the realisation of international standards in relation to religious minorities in the Middle East. *Religion, State and Society, 36* (3). Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/09637490802260385

Girling, F.K. (2015). *The Chaldean catholic church: A study in modern history, ecclesiology and church-state relations (2003–2013).* PhD Theology Department of Theology, Heythrop College, University of London. Retrieved from http://www.heythrop.ac.uk/sites/default/files/docs/publications/theses/Girling,%20K,%20Thesis.pdf

Goldstein-Sabbah, S.R., & Murre-van den Berg, H.L. (Eds.). (2016). *Modernity, minority, and the public sphere: Jews and Christians in the Middle East.* Leiden: Brill.

Gunter, M.M. (2005). The Kurdish minority identity in Iraq. In M. Shatzmiller (Ed.). *Nationalism and minority identities in Islamic societies* (pp. 262-282). Montreal, Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Haddad, S., McLaurin, R.D., & Nakhleh, E.A. (1979). Minorities in containment: The Arabs of Israel. In R.D. McLaurin (Ed.), *The political role of minority groups in the Middle East* (pp. 76-198). New York: Praeger.

Haddad, F. (2011). *Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic visions of unity.* London: Hurst.

Haddad, F. (2014, August 5). "Marked" for exclusion: The problem of pluralism, state-building, and communal identities in Iraq and the Arab world. *The Middle East Institute.* Retrieved from http://www.mei.edu/content/map/marked-exclusion-problem-pluralism-state-building-and-communal-identities-iraq-and-arab-world

Haddad, F. (2017). 'Sectarianism' and its discontents in the study of the Middle East. *Middle East Journal, 71* (3). Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.3751/71.3.12

Hourani, A.H. (1947). *Minorities in the Arab world.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hudson, M. (1988). The problem of authoritative power in Lebanese politics: Why consociationalism failed. In N. Shehadi, & D. Haffar Mills (Eds.), *Lebanon: A history of conflict and consensus* (pp. 224-239). Oxford and London: Centre for Lebanese Studies and I B Tauris & Co. Ltd.

Jureidini, R. (2005). Migrant workers and xenophobia in the Middle East. In Y. Bangura, & R. Stavenhagen (Eds.), *Racism and Public Policy* (pp. 48-71). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Karpat, K. H. (1982). Millets and nationality: The roots of the incongruity of nation and state in the post-ottoman era. In B. Braude, & B. Lewis (Eds.), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire* (141-169). New York: Holmes and Meier.

Khalidi, R. (1997). Palestinian identity: The construction of modern national consciousness. *New York: Columbia University Press.*

Kitromilides, P. (2007). *An orthodox commonwealth: Symbolic legacies and cultural encounters in southeastern Europe.* Aldershot, Hampshire, Burlington: Ashgate.

Kuppinger, P. (2014, August). Crushed? Cairo's garbage collectors and neoliberal urban politics. *Journal of Urban Affairs,* 36 (2). doi: 10.1111/juaf.12073

Lijphart, A. (1999). Patterns of democracy: Government forms and performance in thirty-six countries. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Longva, A.N. (2000). Citizenship in the Gulf States: Conceptualization and practice. In N.A. Butenschøn, U. Davis, & M.S. Hassassian (Eds.), *Citizenship and the state in the Middle East: Approaches and applications* (pp. 179-200). Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

Longva, A.N., & Roald, A. S. (Eds.). (2012). *Religious minorities in the Middle East: Domination, self-empowerment, accommodation.* Leiden: Brill.

Maggiolini, P. (2016). “Disentangling” some knots: Narratives and counter-narratives of the Christian presence in the contemporary Middle East”. In M. Raheb (Ed.), *Shifting identities: changes in the social, political, and religious structures in the Arab world* (pp. 39-65). Bethlehem: Diyar Publisher.

Maggiolini, P., & Demichelis, M. (Eds.). (2017). *The struggle to define a nation. Rethinking nationalism in the contemporary Islamic world.* Piscataway Nj: Gorgias Press LLC.

Mahmood, S. (2012, April). Religious freedom, the minority question, and geopolitics in the Middle East. *Comparative Studies in Society and History, 25* (2). Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417512000096

Mahmood, S. (2016). *Religious difference in a secular age: A minority report.* Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Massad, J.A. (2001). *Colonial effects: The making of national identity in Jordan.* New York: Colombia University Press.

Massad, J.A. (2008). Producing the Palestinian as other: Jordan and the Palestinians. In R. Heacock (Ed.), *Temps et espaces en Palestine: Flux et résistances identitaires* (on-line). Beyrouth: Presses de l’Ifpo.

Matthiesen, T. (2013). *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab spring that wasn’t.* Cambridge: University of Cambridge.

McCallum, F. (2010). *Christian religious leadership in the Middle East: The political role of the patriarch.* Lewiston NY: Edwin Mellen Press.

McCallum, F. (2012). Religious institutions and authoritarian states: Church–state relations in the Middle East. *Third World Quarterly, 33* (1). Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2012.627238

McGahern, U. (2011). *Palestinian Christians in Israel: State attitudes towards non-Muslims in a Jewish state.* London & New York: Routledge.

McLaurin, R.D. (Ed.). (1979). *The political role of minority groups in the Middle East.* New York: Praeger.

Medda-Windischer, R. (2017). Old and new minorities: Diversity governance and social cohesion from the perspective of minority rights. *Acta Univ. Sapientiae, European and Regional Studies, 11.* Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1515/auseur-2017-0002

Meir, M. (1998, July). Nomads and the state: The spatial dynamics of centrifugal and centripetal forces among the Israeli Negev Bedouin. *Political Geography Quarterly, 7* (3). Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1016/0260-9827(88)90015-8

Muasher, M. (2014). *The second Arab awakening: And the battle for pluralism.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Müller-Somerfeld, H. (2016). The League of Nations, A-mandates and minority rights during the mandate period in Iraq (1920–1932). In S.R. Goldstein-Sabbah, & H.L. Murre-van den Berg (Eds.), *Modernity, minority, and the public sphere: Jews and Christians in the Middle East* (pp. 258-283). Leiden: Brill.

Olson, R. (1997, May). Turkey-Syria relations since the Gulf War: Kurds and water. *Middle East Policy, 5* (2). doi: 10.1111/j.1475-4967.1997.tb00272.x

Patai, R. (2015). *Kingdom of Jordan.* Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Peteet, J. (1996). From refugees to minority: Palestinians in post-war Lebanon, *Middle East report. Minorities in the Middle East: Power and the politics of difference. Middle East Research and Information Project, Inc.* (MERIP), 200. doi: 10.2307/3013265

Pfostl, E., & Kymlicka, W. (2014). *Multiculturalism and minority rights in the Arab world edited.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Picard, E. (2012). Conclusion: Nation-building and minority rights in the Middle East. In A.N. Longva, & A.S. Roald (Eds.), *Religious minorities in the Middle East: domination, self-empowerment, accommodation* (pp. 230-255). Leiden; Boston, Mass: Brill.

Plebani, A., & Maggiolini, P. (2015). The centrality of the enemy in al-Baghdadi's caliphate. In M. Maggioni, & P. Magri (Eds.), *Twitter and Jihad: The communication strategy of ISIS* (pp. 27- 48). Novi Ligure: Epoké.

Rabo, A. (2012). 'We are Christians and we are equal citizens': Perspectives on particularity and pluralism in contemporary Syria. *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations, 23* (1). Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2011.634598

Rassam, S. (2006). *Christianity in Iraq. Its origins and development to the present day.* Leominster: Gracewing.

Robson, L. (2016). *Minorities and the modern Arab world: new perspectives.* Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

Salloum, S. (2013). Minorities in Iraq. Memory, identity and challenges. Baghdad, Beirut: Masarat for Cultural and Media Development.

Savelsberg, E., & Gorgas, J.T., (2017). Re-considering minorities' position in the Middle East: The Kurdish case in Syria. In K.S. Parker, & T.E. Nasrallah (Eds.), *Middle Eastern minorities and the Arab spring: Identity and community in the twenty- first century* (pp. 17-43). Piscataway NJ: Gorgias Press LLC.

Sayigh, R. (1995). Palestinians in Lebanon: Harsh present, uncertain future. *Journal of Palestine Studies,* 25 (1). doi: 10.2307/2538103

Shatzmiller, M. (Ed.). (2005). *Nationalism and minority identities in Islamic societies.* Montreal, Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Sluglett, P. (2016). From millet to minority: Another look at the non-Muslim communities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In L. Robson (Ed.). *Minorities and the modern Arab world: New Perspectives* (pp. 19-38). Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

Tocqueville, A. (J. Mayer, Ed.) (1969). *Democracy in America.* Garden City: Anchor Books.

Van den Boogert, M.H. (2012). Millets: Past and present. In A.N. Longva, & A.S. Roald (Eds.), *Religious minorities in the Middle East: Domination, self-empowerment, accommodation* (pp. 27-46). Leiden; Boston, Mass: Brill.

White, B.T. (2012). *The emergence of minorities in the Middle East: The politics of community in French mandate.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Yavuz, H.M. (2005). Kurdish nationalism in Turkey. In M. Shatzmiller (Ed.), *Nationalism and minority identities in Islamic societies* (pp. 229-262). Montreal, Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Yiftachel, O., & Meir, A. (1998). *Ethnic frontiers and peripheries: Landscapes of development and inequality in Israel.* Boulder: Westview Press.

Zeidel, R. (2014). Gypsies and society in Iraq: Between marginality, folklore and romanticism. *Middle Eastern Studies, 50* (1). Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2013.849696

Zubaida, S. (2002, May). The fragments imagine the nation: The case of Iraq. *International Journal of Middle East Studies, 34* (2). Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743802002039

The Future of Syrian Christians after the Arab Spring

Georges Fahmi[*1]

---

*Research Fellow, Middle East Directions Programme, Robert Schuman Center for Advanced Studies, European University Institute

[1] The author would like to thank Salam Kawakibi for his invaluable support and advice during the fieldwork for this research.

"O people, and I mean you the non-Moslems who use the letter *dad* [whom speak the Arabic language and are Arabs], I appeal to you to forget past wrongs and rancour, and what has been committed by fathers and grandfathers. . . Let the wise men among us tell the non-Arabs and the foreigners who instigate ill-will among us: allow us to manage our own affairs. . . Permit us to manage our affairs in this world, and make religions rule only the next. Let us come together around the same declarations: Long live the nation! Long live the watan, the fatherland! Let us live free and strong." ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī (1855-1902) (Funatsu, 2006, pp. 14-15)

The wave of popular uprisings that started in 2010 in Tunisia before spreading to other countries in the Middle East had offered religious and ethnic minorities an opportunity to obtain full rights in a new democratic political regime. However, a violent turn of events in many of these countries, as in the case of Libya, Syria and Yemen, has put religious and ethnic communities under unprecedented threats. In particular, this is the case of Christian communities in Syria that have found themselves caught between the rise of radical Islamist groups and the inability of the political regime to offer them basic public services, even including security.

This chapter seeks to understand how the Syrian Revolution has influenced the status of Syrian Christians through its different phases, from the peaceful uprising in its first year to the military confrontation afterwards. The chapter is divided into four main sections: the first offers an overview of the regime-Church relationship before 2011; the second looks at the different Christian reactions to the Syrian uprising; the third analyses the current challenges facing the majority of the Christian communities; and the fourth looks at the possible measures to protect the presence of the Christians in Syria, and the Middle East at large.

Church-State Relations in Syria Before 2011

The Syrian Christian community is composed of 11 different religious denominations: the Greek Orthodox Church, considered to be the largest and oldest Christian denomination, standing under the patriarch of Antioch and All the East who resides in Damascus; and the Oriental Orthodox churches represented by the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Syrian (or Syriac) Orthodox Church. As for Uniate churches, which owe obedience to Rome, the largest group is Melchites (also called the Greek Catholic

Church), the Armenian Catholic Church, the Maronites, the Syrian Catholic Church and the Uniate Assyrian Church. In addition, there is also the Nestorian Church, consisting mainly of Christians who fled Iraq in the 1930s. Moreover, there are smaller Christian groups that include the Roman Catholic Church and other Protestant groups (Fahlbusch et al. 2008, pp. 279-280). In addition, Damascus is home to three patriarchates: Greek Orthodox, Melkite Greek Catholic, and the Syrian (or Syriac) Orthodox.

Unlike other ethnic and religious communities in Syria, such as the Druze or the Kurds, Syrian Christians are spread over most of the Syrian territory. The majority lives in and around Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Hama, Latakia and Al-Hassakah.

While the current Syrian regime, established in 1970 by Hafez al-Assad and resumed by his son Bashar in 2000, has adopted a secular nationalist discourse, it has treated the Christian religious institutions as the representative of the Christian community before the political regime, following the same Ottoman *millet* system. According to this pact, Christians "are granted certain rights and Churches limited freedom and prerogatives in managing some of their internal affairs, in exchange for total loyalty and acquiescence to the deprivation of their political rights and parts of their civil rights" (Mitri, 2018, p. 117). While allowing the religious leadership certain political and economic advantages, the regime nonetheless put these different religious figures under its strict security control, as it does with other religious institutions.

The authoritarian policies of Hafez al-Assad targeting both political and civil societies has left the Christians with no other institution to seek refuge but the Church to defend them and channel their demands and concerns to the political authority.

This alliance between the Church and the regime has also been reinforced with the wave of radical Islamism in the 1970s. The fear of the Islamist groups has led many Christians to support the regime, particularly after the violent struggle between the regime and the Muslim Brotherhood between 1978 and 1982.

This institutional relationship has served both the regime and the Church. From the Church side, this deal allows it to be the only representative of the Christians, in addition to other economic benefits. From the regime side, it is much easier to deal with one organisation to represent the Christians. The regime also has interest in strengthening the position of the Church within the Christian community not to allow other Christian oppositional figures to gain more power and popularity among the Christian community (McCallum, 2012, p. 121).

With the rise to power of Bashar al-Assad in 2000 after the death of his father, he has kept the same *millet* deal with the Christian communities but has sought to take advantage of it to strengthen the legitimacy of his new rule internally and externally. Bashar relaxed some of the strict secular aspects of the deal and instead stressed the element of religious tolerance of the Syrian regime. By doing so, the Syrian regime aimed internally at framing Christians as the regime's favoured minority and externally at framing the Syrian regime as the protector of Christians (Asfar, 2017, p. 6). Christian figures were appointed in political positions, including Bassel Nasrallah, who was appointed as the advisor of the Syrian Mufti Badr Al-Din Hassoun (Al-Abdullah & Al-Hallak, 2017). This has resulted in greater support for the regime among the Church leadership and many Christians as well, notably its wealthiest class. The regime also controlled the business elite, including the Christian one, which became dependent on good relations with the country's leaders for its wealth.

The tragic events in Iraq after the US occupation in 2003, particularly the violence against the Christian communities, has deeply influenced the views of many Syrian Christians with regard to the cost of changing the al-Assad regime. As Western pressure increased on the Syrian regime after the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in February 2005, many Christians sided with the regime fearing the same Iraqi scenario. Almost all the businesses owned by Christians in all Syrian cities displayed portraits of Bashar al-Assad bearing the slogan: “We all are with you, Bachar” (Kawakibi, 2010).

Therefore, maintaining this adaptation of the *millet* approach is seen to be benefiting both the Church leaders and the regime. However, it left a number of Christian actors alienated, such as a part of the Christian youth and a number of Christian political figures who refused to be treated as a part of a religious minority represented by its religious leaders. They wished instead for full citizenship rights within a democratic regime that treats all Syrians equally, as was the case with the Syrian journalist Michel Kilo who was one of the leading figure of the Damascus spring in 2000 calling for political, legal and economic reforms and helped launch the Damascus Declaration 2005 calling for a gradual and peaceful transition to democracy and the equality of all citizens in a secular and sovereign Syria.

The wave of popular uprisings that started in Tunisia in December 2010 and then moved to Egypt one month later has shaped the imagination of many Syrian youths, Christians included, who thought they could follow the same path to remove their dictator. In March 2011, Syria joined the wave of Arab uprisings with the first protest against the regime in Damascus.

The Different Christian Reactions to the 2011 Syrian Uprising

With the Syrian uprising that started in March 2011, different groups have insisted that Syria's Christians supported the al-Assad regime. On the one hand, the Syrian regime, through its discourse, tried to strengthen its legitimacy in the West as the protector of religious minorities in the face of radical Islamic groups. On the other hand, certain Islamic voices from the opposition insisted on the same discourse to frame the political struggle in Syria as mainly sectarian between the Sunni majority and the Alwaite ruling elite supported by other minority groups. This perception has often been strengthened by three main factors:

- Most Christian areas in Syria have not witnessed demonstrations against the regime, unlike the Sunni areas. There have been only a few exceptions to this pattern, such as the governorate of Al-Hassakah in the far northeast corner of Syria, where a large number of Assyrians joined the popular protests against the regime. In other cities such as Homs and Damascus, Christians wishing to protest against the regime had to go to other neighbourhoods to join in.

- Many Church leaders have spoken in the name of all Christians in declaring their support for the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, which has given the impression that all Christians adopted the same political position of their religious leadership.

- Many Christian voices supporting the revolution often refused to identify with their Christian religious identity, and insisted that they were only Syrians. While this position was mainly motivated by their belief in a democratic regime where Syrians shall not be identified according to their religious identities but only as Syrian citizens, it has also given the impression that there were no Christian voices engaged in the 2011 uprising.

A close look at the reactions of the Christians towards the Syrian Revolution shows that their attitudes varied from one Christian actor to another, one moment to another, and one geographical area to another. There are certainly Christians who support the regime, including senior religious figures, state officials, businesspeople whose interests are invested in it and even Christian militias that took up arms to join the regime military forces. Nevertheless, there are also Christians who have supported the revolution from day one and took part in the peaceful protests in different Syrian cities such as Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Al-Qamishli and Latakia. In addition, there is also a third group, arguably the largest, that does not have a clear position towards the uprising or the regime, and focuses on its own survival.

Syrian Christians Supporting the Uprising

Many Christian youths have supported the revolution from day one, hoping to build a new democratic regime based on freedom, justice and human rights. In Damascus, for example, a group of more than 50 Christians, including three monks, began meeting in 2011 to discuss how Christians could support the revolution. They rejected the Church leadership's supportive stance toward the al-Assad regime and drafted a letter emphasising the values of freedom and dignity for all Syrians, which they delivered to a number of Christian religious leaders. The letter stated clearly that:

"We call upon you not to reduce the current popular movement to a mere 'plot', and ask you to adopt a new understanding of what is happening today in Syria by placing it in its humanitarian, political, social, economic and historical contexts. It is not possible today to continue to deny Syria's suffering from the absence of political life and the restriction on freedoms, the dominance of a security approach, and the spread of institutional corruption. We also condemn all practices, whether intentional or spontaneous, which try to link the future of minorities in Syria to any political system. We are Syrian citizens with the desire to build a free democratic civil society and to hold us dependent on any regime that threatens Christians and their future in this country" (member of the group, personal communication, 3 December 2016).

Other Christian activists have worked to raise awareness among their Christian communities about the revolution and its goals. They wanted to challenge the regime discourse that tried to frame the revolutionaries as Sunni terrorists who would like to massacre the Christians. Among one such group was Bassel Shehadeh, a young film director from Damascus who went to the city of Homs to document the revolution through his videos and to train other revolutionary activists to make their own videos. He was killed in May 2012 as the regime bombed the city (Sabbagh, 2015, pp. 84-86).

In cities such as Aleppo, Homs, Al-Qamishli and Latakia, Christian activists have taken part in demonstrations and sit-ins. In one of the demonstrations in Homs, for example, the protest was led by a Christian woman carried on the shoulders of the protesters (Christian activist from the city of Homs, personal communication, 22 May 2016).

Many of these Christian activists have been arrested; some of them several times, others lost their lives. According to the Syrian Network for Human Rights (2012), 69 Syrian Christians were killed by the Syrian security forces from the beginning of the Syrian Revolution until December 2012 and at least 450 were arrested up until December 2014 (Syrian Network for Human Rights, 2014).

A few religious figures have also sided with the revolution, such as Father Paolo Dall'Oglio, an Italian Jesuit who founded the monastic community of *Deir Mar Musa al-Habashi* in the region of Damascus. He was expelled by the Syrian regime because of his support for the Syrian uprising. However, he entered Syria several times through the opposition controlled areas until he was kidnapped in July 2013 when he was in the city of Raqqa in an attempt to open a dialogue with the leaders of the self-proclaimed Islamic State (ISIS) to free political prisoners. His last post on Facebook on 27 July 2013 reads:

"Dear friends, I came today to the city of Raqqa and I feel happy for two reasons: the first is that I am in the land of Syria, the homeland and in a liberated city, the second reason is the wonderful welcome by this beautiful city. I enjoyed a wonderful Ramadan night with the people on the streets walking freely and harmoniously. It is a picture of the homeland we want for all Syrians. Of course, nothing is perfect but starting is good. Pray for me to succeed in the task for which I have come. The revolution is not expectations but commitment! Peace be upon you and I wish a wonderful month of Ramadan for all of us."

In addition, the Syrian opposition includes several Christian figures, such as George Sabra, chief negotiator for the High Negotiations Committee, and there are even Christians in the Free Syrian Army, including Assad Hanna, a member of the Free Syrian Army Northern Division's political office. The Assyrian Democratic Organisation was also among the founding members of the Syrian National Council in October 2011 and one of its well-known members, Abdelahad Steifo, is Vice President of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces.

With the militarisation of the revolution, many of these Christian activists moved toward humanitarian work. Their Christian family names make it easier for them to pass through regime checkpoints to deliver aid to areas under siege (Christian activist engaged in a humanitarian work, personal communication, 19 May 2016).

As the regime started to adopt the "protection of the minorities" discourse, and the opposition adopted a more Sunni Islamic discourse, the Christians supporting the revolution started to insist on their religious identity in order to show to both sides, the regime and the opposition, that the uprising is not only Sunni, even though many of them would have refused earlier to be identified by their religious identity. Answering a question about the number of Christians who were part of the revolutionary organisational committees in Homs, a Christian activist replied: "I am not sure. We did not use to identify each other with our religion. We only thought of this after the regime started to use the discourse on protecting religious minorities, and we wanted to prove that there are also

Christians supporting the revolution" (Christian activist from the city of Homs, 22 May 2016).

One common feature of most of the Christian youths who supported the revolution is that most of them were already involved in political and social activities before March 2011. Bassel Shehadeh is a case in point. Bassel took part in different voluntary activities before, such as delivering aid for the displaced families from the Syrian Jezira region due to the draught.

Christian Voices Supporting the Regime

However, Christian voices have sided with the Syrian regime, including many top ranked religious leaders. The leaders of the different Syrian churches rejected the call for regime change from the beginning of the uprising, and asked their followers not to participate in the protests against the regime. Already in March 2011, the Council of Bishops in Damascus issued a statement insisting that:

"What is happening in our country is a foreign conspiracy in which, unfortunately, internal actors have been mixed up and the malicious media outlets have tried to distort the bright image that Syria enjoys at home and abroad. We thank God that these conspiracies have not reached their goal and purpose. The beloved Syria was and will remain impervious to the enemies of the nation in the unity of its people of different sects, the cohesion of its people, their awareness, their deep faith and their love for their homeland." [2]

Another example of Christian religious actors supporting the Syrian regime is Father Ilyas Zahlawi, priest, intellectual and founder of the Choir of Joy. The Choir of Joy was founded in 1977 and includes more than 500 members. Bashar al-Assad supported the Choir before 2011 as part of his new approach to emphasise tolerance of the regime towards religious minorities, particularly the Christians. After 2011, the Choir organised concerts in Syria and in different European countries during which it insisted on its support for the Syrian regime as the protector of the Christian minority in Syria. In December 2015, Bashar al-Assad and his wife visited the Notre Dame de Damas church where the choir was practising for its Christmas concert.

Other Christians went even further and decided to take up arms to support the Syrian regime, within the frame of the National Defense Units (pro-regime militias under the control of the Syrian army) as is the case of militias based in the region of Wadi-el-Nassara near Homs. The group was founded by a Christian businessperson close to the regime. Moreover, the National Defense Units established in Al-Suqaylabiyah and in

---

[2] To read the full statement on the website of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate (in Arabic), see: http://www.syrianorthodox.com/readnews.php?id=888

Mahardah near the city of Hama, inhabited by Christians. The members of these units have often been trained by the Syrian national army. Their main mission is to protect the Christian neighbourhoods and to manage checkpoints. While leadership and funders of these units are figures close to the Syrian regime, their members are not necessarily all pro-Assad. According to one senior religious leader, Christians in his area are willing to take up arms to defend their neighbourhoods against attack from armed Islamic groups but this does not translate into support for the regime. They refuse to serve with the military and are unwilling to fight for this regime. Many believe the regime cares little for their safety (Syrian religious figure, personal communication, 22 September 2016). In addition, for many Christian youths who are required to join the military, applying to join the National Defense Units represented an escape. Instead of being sent to the battlefield in areas like Aleppo, these Christian youths would only serve for a few hours every day in their own neighbourhood while living with their families (Masouh, 2015, pp. 94-96).

In the city of Al-Hassakah also, one part of the Christian Sutoro armed militia has sided with the regime. The Sutoro (meaning “security” or “protection” in the Syriac language) forces were established in March 2013 and are present in the cities of Al-Hassakah, Al-Qamishli, Malkiah and Qahtaniya. The group includes youths from different Assyrian groups, such as the Syriac Union Party (SUP), the Assyrian Democratic Organisation (ADO) and the Syria Mother Youth Caucus. It first refused to take a political side and focused on protecting Christian neighbourhoods. However, it could not resist the political pressure from the two main political actors in the region, the regime and the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD). A split took place after a visit by the regime’s National Defense Unit to the Sutoro headquarter in Al-Qamishli, where they offered the Christian militia the Syrian flag and the picture of Bashar al-Assad to be put in their office. The Syria Mother Youth Caucus supported this move, while the SUP and the ADO rejected it, leading to a split within these forces, with one faction supporting the regime, particularly in the city of Al-Qamishli, where the regime still has a presence, and the other supporting the Kurdish authority. The two factions kept the Arabic name but with different English transliteration: Sootoro for the pro-regime militia and Sutoro for the pro-Kurdish group (Hanna & Hourani, 2016, p. 7).

Yet both of these groups – those who support the regime or the revolution – are a minority among Christians. The majority are neither with the regime nor with the opposition. They look sceptically toward the revolution, particularly after its Islamisation. Their political attitudes vary over time and from one geographical area to another. Unlike those who support the regime or the revolution, this group has no definite political position in the current struggle. They simply care for their survival.

The Majority of Syrian Christians and the Question of Survival

With the militarisation and then Islamisation of the Syrian uprising in 2012-2013, many Christians lost interest in the question of supporting the regime or the opposition but rather focused on how to survive this armed conflict. For many of them, both sides were not concerned with their safety but were following only their political interests. An example of this trend is the Syriac Orthodox Bishop in Aleppo, Youhanna Ibrahim. According to Bishop Ibrahim, both the opposition and the regime committed mistakes, and they should return to wisdom in order to stop the bloodshed. Bishop Ibrahim refused to follow the regime line of accusing the opposition forces of attacking the Christians, and insisted that "there is no persecution of Christians and there is no single plan to kill Christians. Everyone respects Christians," adding that "bullets are random and not targeting the Christians because they are Christians" ("Syria's Beleaguered Christians", 2015). Ibrahim also resisted the idea of allowing the Christians in Aleppo to take up arms to defend themselves against the opposition groups that then controlled large parts of Aleppo. Instead of supporting one side of the conflict over the other, Bishop Ibrahim tried to play a mediatory role. However, he was kidnapped together with the Greek Orthodox Archbishop Paul Yazigi in April 2013 while travelling to negotiate the release of kidnapped persons.

The attacks against the churches are a clear example of Bishop Ibrahim's point about Christians being caught in the violence committed by both sides of the conflict. Both the regime forces and the opposition groups are targeting churches. In its report "Targeting Christian Places of Worship in Syria" released in 2015, the Syrian Network for Human Rights documented 63 churches attacked since March 2011: 40 by the regime, six by ISIS, one by the al-Nusra Front, 14 by armed opposition factions, and two by unidentified groups. In addition, 11 churches turned into military or administrative bases: six by the regime forces, two by ISIS, one by the al-Nusra Front, and two by opposition groups (Syrian Network for Human Rights, 2015).

Trapped between both the opposition and the regime, the majority of Syrian Christians is currently facing two main challenges. From the opposition side, they fear the growing influence of radical Islamist groups and, from the regime side, they fear the deterioration of the regime's capacity to offer basic services, including guaranteeing security in its own areas.

The Rise of Radical Islamism

The increasing influence of the Islamic militias within the revolutionary scene has fuelled fear among the Christians of the alternative to the al-Assad regime. These Islamic militias include both al-Qaeda and ISIS. Hay'at Tahrir Al Sham (former al-Nusra Front) appeared in late 2011 calling for Jihad against the Syrian regime, while ISIS officially announced its presence in April 2013, and expanded its control to include large areas of the provinces of Raqqa, Aleppo, Deir Al-Zour, Idlib and Al-Hasakah in only one year.

The decline of the Free Syrian Army's control over the growing Islamist factions left the revolutionary scene for these Islamist groups to represent the opposition to the regime. The emergence of these Jihadist organisations, in addition to a number of Islamist factions such as the Army of Islam and the movement of Ahrar al-Sham, contributed to the rise of fear among the Christian communities, in particular those who live close to these groups' areas of influence.

From their side, Syrian Islamic factions have failed to address the fears of Christians; on the contrary, in many cases they have used violence against religious minorities. This is particularly the case of ISIS. After its control of Raqqa in summer 2014, ISIS issued a number of restrictions on the Christian community in the city, including paying tax in exchange for their safety; not making renovations to churches, displaying crosses or other religious symbols outside churches, ringing church bells or praying in public; not carrying arms; and following other rules imposed by ISIS on their daily lives. ISIS offered Christians three choices: to accept these conditions, to convert to Islam or to reject these rules and risk being killed ("Syria Crisis: ISIS Imposes Rules on Christians in Raqqa", 2014). In addition, in February 2015, ISIS attacked the Assyrian villages in the Khabour region and held more than 200 people including women and children hostages for more than a year until the Assyrian Church of the East paid a ransom to release most of them ("Islamic State Releases Assyrian Christian Hostages", 2016).

Hay'at Tahrir Al Sham tried to adopt a different discourse towards the Christians but it often failed. The case of the village of Ma'loulah is a clear example. Ma'loulah is a majority Christian town where Western Neo-Aramaic is still spoken. The town tried to maintain a neutral position during the conflict. However, the rebel forces led by the al-Nusra Front attacked the city in September 2013, and in December 2013 kidnapped 13 nuns from their convent and held them as hostages for three months. This move has sent negative messages to other Christian communities in different Syrian cities, even though the nuns were freed afterwards and said they were kindly treated ("Syria Crisis: Nuns Freed by Rebels Arrive in Damascus", 2014).

Another example is the city of Idlib, which was captured by Jaish al-Fath, an alliance of Islamist groups led by the al-Nusra Front, in March 2015. While the Islamist coalition tried to calm down the fears of the Christians in the city, they could not enforce these rules on all their fighters, and foreign fighters from al-Nusra killed two Christians after claims they worked in a liquor store (Barnard, 2015).

All these incidents have increased the fear among Christian communities all over Syria. Most Christians do not differentiate between the different Islamist militias and believe that they will be the one to pay the highest price if any of these militias invade their areas.

State Institution Efficiency

The lack of basic public services raises another concern for many Christians. In Aleppo, some Christians have shown discontent with the poor public services provided by the state and accused the regime of focusing its investment on the coastal region only. Private and public investment has been shifting since 2011 to the coastal area. According to Jihad Yazigi (2016), "in 2015, for instance, 32 percent of the large private investments licensed by the Syrian Investment Agency (SIA) were located in the Tartous and Latakia provinces, while only 27 percent were located in Damascus and Aleppo. By comparison, in 2010 Damascus and Aleppo attracted a combined 40.5 percent of the projects licensed by the SIA compared with only 4.5 percent for Latakia and Tartous."

In another Syrian city, a senior religious leader warned the regime not to test the patience of Christians in his area because of the deterioration in public services, including the supply of clean water, electricity and gas (Syrian religious figure, personal communication, 22 September 2016).

The lack of security represents an important concern for Christians living in the regime-controlled areas. Many Syrians accuse the regime of being responsible for this situation as its amnesty in 2011 allowed a number of common criminals to be released and then recruited in the regime's militias (Becker, 2014, p. 3). In the secured zone of Latakia, the kidnapping of young Christians has become a major concern for Christian families. Latakia is often considered one of the quiet areas relatively isolated from the armed conflict in the rest of the Syrian territory. Some Christians accuse security officers of being involved in these crimes as way to gain money (Christian civil society activist based in Latakia, personal communication, 22 June 2017).

In Damascus, some Christians who used to support the Syrian regime now complain about the heavy presence of Shia militias in Christian areas, such as Bab Tuma. This presence has put social pressure on Christian families and, in many cases, obliged them to change their way of living. When asked why the Syrian regime allows this strong Shia presence in Christian areas that have supported the regime, the answer given by a Christian activist was "do you think the regime can stop them?" The Syrian state's inability to enforce security and order, and to delegate this authority to other Lebanese or Iraqi militias, represents a serious concern for the Christians of Damascus (Christian journalist based in Damascus, personal communication, 23 March 2017).

What Policies to Protect the Christians in Syria?

As a result of these challenges, many Syrian Christians have decided to leave their homes and move to other cities inside Syria or to leave the country. The migration of Syrian Christians is not a new phenomenon. Indeed, it has been taking place over the last five decades. However, it has significantly accelerated in the past few years due to the armed conflict, particularly among the youth, who saw no future in the current situation. Moreover, many Christian youths, as is the case of other religious communities, wanted to escape the compulsory military service (Davison, 2016). While there are no official statistics, estimated numbers of Syrian Christians fell from 15% of the total population in the early 1980s to 4.8% in 2008 (Kawakibi, 2010). Currently, the figure is estimated at no more than 2%. In cities like Deir Al-Zour and Raqqa, there is almost no Christian presence. Aleppo, Hama and Homs witnessed a sharp decline in the number of Christian inhabitants. The original Christian communities in Damascus, Latakia and Wadi al-Nassara have remained largely stable, and have often hosted displaced Christians from other cities (Oehring, 2017, p. 15).

These developments have raised concerns inside and outside Syria about the future of the Christians in Syria and the Middle East at large, and what policies shall be adopted to protect the Christian communities and ensure their future in the region.

Some countries have reacted to this question by favouring the acceptance of Syrian Christian refugees, as is the case of Australia. Data shows that 78% of 18,563 refugees from Syria and Iraq granted entry from July 2015 to January 2017 identified themselves as Christian (Patrick, 2017). The French authorities have also declared it will help facilitate visas for Iraqi and Syrian Christians seeking refuge in France (Elzas, 2015). In addition, US President Donald Trump said that persecuted Christians from Syria would be given priority over other Syrian refugees (Burke, 2017). Moreover, Christian religious organisations have been offering help to the Christian communities still living in Syria, as is the case with Aid to the Church in Need, a pontifical foundation of the Catholic Church, which is offering food, shelter and medicine to 2,200 Christian families in Aleppo and Al-Hassakah.

However, such an approach that focuses solely on protecting Syrian Christians is unlikely to improve the situation of Christian communities in the Middle East in the long term. In a meeting between a Syrian bishop and a German official, the latter asked how the international community could protect Christians in Syria. The bishop answered that they should work to protect all Syrians, not only Christians (Bishop E. Toume, personal communication, 22 September 2016). This reaction is idealistic but also rational. The bishop knows very well that addressing the challenges facing the Christians cannot be done independently from addressing the challenges facing the region as a whole. The future of Christians in Syria and the Middle East at large is strongly connected to the future of other religious and ethnic communities and it would be naïve to think that the solution to the current crisis of Christians invokes the adoption of measures that would protect only Christians, while ignoring the others. What is needed is a wider approach that goes beyond narrow sectarian solutions to tackle the ongoing armed conflict, the relation between the different religious and ethnic communities, and the shape of the new Syrian state and political regime that should be built after the end of the war.

Ending the Ongoing Armed Conflict

The future of Christians in Syria is not connected to the presence of the al-Assad regime. Bishop Youhanna Ibrahim admitted that Christians have serious concerns over their future in Syria, but he insisted that "our concerns are not related to those who will come to power, we are afraid that whoever will come may close their eyes and ears, or will not like to deal with us" ("Syria's Christians Caught in the Middle", 2012).

The continuation of the war is itself the biggest threat to the presence of Christians in Syria. Regardless of the winners and losers of the current armed conflict, reaching a compromise between the different sides of the conflict would in itself calm many of the Christians' concerns about their future. Such a political compromise needs to be not only imposed but also cherished by the different political groups in order for it to ensure stability. Political solutions based on coercion would only lead to further escalation on the ground between the different religious and ethnic communities, even if all political parties are involved. Rather, such a compromise should be achieved through a dialogue that takes into consideration the concerns of the different players.

Building Trust between the Different Religious and Ethnic Communities

Rebuilding trust between the different religious and ethnic communities is an important step to ensure a durable and stable peace in Syria. The Syrian Civil War has left many wounds between Syria's different religious and ethnic communities, including the Christian communities, as with the Kurdish-Christian and Sunni-Christian tensions.

Hence, in parallel to the political process, there is also a need to work on the societal level to build trust between the different Syrian communities in order to overcome the experience of the conflict. Given their legitimacy within their own groups, religious leaders can play an important role in this process. Bishop Elia Toume of Wadi Al Nassara in the region of Homs offers a positive experience in this regard. He established in his region centres for peace and reconciliation mainly targeting the children from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds. These centres are perceived by Bishop Toume as an important step towards a larger societal reconciliation in his region. Through its different classes, these centres provide physical, educational and psychological support to help the children overcome the experience of war (Bishop E. Toume, personal communication, 7 July 2017).

However, to ensure a positive role for Christian religious figures in similar reconciliation processes, they should avoid taking political sides in the current conflict in order to gain the trust of the different ethnic and religious groups. The decision of some senior religious figures to declare their full support for the regime has harmed their image and that of the Christian community as a whole, among other religious communities. It would be more productive for the different churches to focus instead on developmental projects that serve all Syrians regardless of their religious and ethnic backgrounds. Such an approach, as practised by Bishop Toume, would help to bridge the gap between the different religious and ethnic communities and decrease the level of religious polarisation, particularly in the areas that experienced armed confrontations, as in Aleppo and Homs.

Reforming State Institutions

As shown in the earlier section, the main challenge facing Christians in Syria is the growing weakness of state institutions and the increasing fragmentation within the regime's forces. In this case, the weakness of state institutions refers to state institutions' inability to enforce order, to maintain security and to provide public services for its citizens.

Within this frame, several recommendations can be made on the shape of the new political entity after the end of the war: state institutions and particularly the security forces need to be reformed to increase efficiency and lower corruption, a democratic and transparent decision-making process should be consolidated and all forms of religious discrimination should be terminated.

With regard to Church-state relations, a return to the old *millet* deal that governed the relation between the state and Christians in Syria prior to 2011 is not a viable option anymore as the two parts of the deal have changed much since 2011. On the one hand, state institutions, including the security sector, have significantly weakened since 2011; on the other, the Christian religious leadership has less control over the Christian sphere. With weak state institutions, which have in many cases been unable to protect Christians, and a less powerful Church leadership that is unable to control the anger of its followers, the pact between the regime and the Church is unlikely to work. Rather, there is a need to work on a new social contract where the new Syrian state should keep the same distance from all religious and ethnic communities and fully enforce the principles of citizenship and the rule of law where Syrian Christians would have a chance to claim their religious and political rights as Syrian citizens.

Conclusion

The issue of the future of Christians in Syria has been debated extensively over the past few years within both religious and political circles in the Middle East, Europe and the US.

This chapter has analysed the situation of Syrian Christians through the different phases of the Syrian Revolution and has reached a number of conclusions that challenge some of the arguments taken for granted with regard to this topic.

Christians in Syria are politically divided just like other religious communities in the country, and they cannot be treated as one homogenous group. Moreover, their political position cannot be defined as being for or against the regime. Syrian Christians' political attitude is shaped by their interests in safety and public services and might change from one point in time to another and one geographical area to another.

The question that the majority of the Christians are facing is not whether to side with the regime or with the opposition but rather how to survive the risks posed by both sides. From the opposition side, they fear the growing influence of radical Islamist groups and, from the regime side, they fear the deterioration of the regime's capacity to offer basic services including guaranteeing security in their areas.

The future of Christians in Syria and in other countries in the Middle East is strongly connected to the future of their states and other religious communities. Hence, the struggle for a better future for Christians is the same struggle for all other citizens for democracy, rule of law and full citizenship. The discourse of certain European and

American voices from both state and civil society circles concerning the protection of the Christians in the Middle East can only worsen the situation of Christian communities. Such discourse reinforces some Islamist propaganda that presents Christians as the protégés or even the agents of the West and hence reinforces religious polarisation in these societies. Instead, Western political voices need to frame a discourse that addresses the problems of all religious and ethnic communities in the region, not only those of Christians, and to support their struggle for efficient state institutions and democratic political regimes.

References

Al-Abdullah, I., & Al-Hallak, A. (2017). Massihio Souria [Syria's Christians]. *Al-Jumhuriya.* Retrieved from https://www.aljumhuriya.net/ar/content/%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%88-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9

Asfar, R. (2017). Aleppo Christians: A turbulent history and the path ahead. Policy Alternatives. Arab Reform Initiative. Retrieved from https://www.arab-reform.net/en/node/1188

Barnard, A. (2015, March 30). An anxious wait in Syrian city held by insurgents. *New York Times.* Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/31/world/middleeast/an-anxious-wait-in-syrian-city-held-by-insurgents.html

Becker, P. (2014). Caught between autocracy and jihadism: Syria's Christians hope for the implementation of Geneva I. SWP Comments 29/2014. Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP). Retrieved from https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2014C29_bkp.pdf

Burke, D. (2017). Trump says US will prioritize Christian refugees. *CNN.* Retrieved from https://edition.cnn.com/2017/01/27/politics/trump-christian-refugees/index.html

Davison, J. (2016). Seeing no future, deserters and draft-dodgers flee Syria. *Reuters.* Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-army/seeing-no-future-deserters-and-draft-dodgers-flee-syria-idUSKCN1001PY

Elzas, S. (2015). France taking lead on protecting Iraqi and Syrian Christians. *RFI.* Retrieved from http://en.rfi.fr/france/20150406-france-taking-lead-protecting-iraqi-and-syrian-christians

Fahlbusch, E. et al. (eds.) (2008). The Encyclopedia of Christianity, Volume 5 (Si-Z). Leiden: Brill.

Funatsu, R. (2006). Al-Kawakibi 's thesis and its echoes in the Arab world today. *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review, 7,* 1-40.

Hanna, A., & Hourani, R. (2016). Quwat al-Sotoro [Sotoro's forces]. Toran center. Retrieved from http://www.torancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/%D9%82%D9%88%

D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%AA%D9% 88%D8% B1%D9%88-1.pdf

Islamic State releases Assyrian Christian hostages. (2016, February 22). *BBC.* Retrieved from http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35630196

Kawakibi, S. (2010, April 19). The migration of Syrian Christians. Middle East Institute. Retrieved from http://www.mei.edu/content/migration-syrian-christians

Masouh, S. (2015). Tension in the Christian valley. In F. Stolleis (Ed.), *Playing the sectarian card. Identities and affiliations of local communities in Syria* (90-101). Beirut: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. Retrieved from http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/beirut/12320.pdf

McCallum, F. (2012). Religious institutions and authoritarian states: Church–state relations in the Middle East. *Third World Quarterly,* 33(1), 109–124. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2012.627238

Mitri, T. (2018). Christians in Arab politics. In K. Ellis (Ed.), *Secular nationalism and citizenship in Muslim countries. Arab Christians in the Levant* (107-119). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Oehring, O. (2017). Christians in Syria: Current Situation and Future Outlook. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. Retrieved from http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_47863-544-2-30.pdf?170711155133

Patrick, O. (2017). Australia's immoral preference for Christian refugees. *New York Times.* Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/03/opinion/australias-immoral-preference-for-christian-refugees.html

Sabbagh, R. (2015). Attitudes of Christians in the Syrian capital. In F. Stolleis (Ed.), *Playing the sectarian card. Identities and affiliations of local communities in Syria* (71-89). Beirut: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

Syria crisis: ISIS imposes rules on Christians in Raqqa. (2014, February 27). *BBC.* Retrieved form http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26366197

Syria crisis: Nuns freed by rebels arrive in Damascus. (2014, March 10). *BBC.* Retrieved from http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26510202

Syrian Network for Human Rights. (2012). Statement about casualties and violation among Christians in the Syrian revolution. Retrieved from http://sn4hr.org/blog/2012/12/24/11948/

Syrian Network for Human Rights. (2014, December 28). The Syrian Christian detainees between the government forces' suppression and the extremist organizations terrorism. Retrieved from http://sn4hr.org/wp-content/pdf/english/The_Christian_Syrian_Detainees_between_the_Government_Forces_Suppression_and_the_Extremist_Organizations_Terrorism_en.pdf

Syrian Network for Human Rights. (2015).Targeting Christian places of worship in Syria. Retrieved from http://sn4hr.org/wp-content/pdf/english/Targeting_churches_in_Syria_en.pdf

Syria's beleaguered Christians. (2015, February 25). *BBC.* Retrieved from http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-22270455

Syria's Christians caught in the middle. (2012, April 6). *BBC.* Retrieved from http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-17629499

Yazgi, J. (2016, June 29). Syria's implosion: Political and economic impacts. Retrieved from https://jihadyazigi.com/2016/06/29/syrias-implosion-political-and-economic-impacts/

Questionnements et perspectives de la gouvernance de la diversité culturelle au Maroc

*Said Bennis**

---

*Professeur, Centre d'Études et des Recherches en Sciences Sociales

L'hypothèse adoptée pour analyser les perspectives et les questionnements relatifs à la gestion de la diversité culturelle au Maroc est que le cadre de la régionalisation avancée peut constituer une alternative viable pour asseoir une démocratie territoriale basée sur les spécificités culturelles et linguistiques. À cet égard, il s'agit de démontrer qu'il existe une attitude étatique ambivalente à l'égard des différentes spécificités culturelles et expressions linguistiques territoriales. En effet, on remarque d'une part une discrimination positive à l'égard du sous-composant culturel et linguistique hassani prédominant dans les régions 10, 11 et 12 du sud marocain et d'autre part une discrimination négative à l'égard des autres expressions culturelles et linguistiques locales arabe et amazigh des régions 1 à 9 au nord . Les questions de recherche auxquelles on essaiera de répondre sont les suivantes : (i) Dans quelles mesures les dispositions constitutionnelles et institutionnelles permettent-elles de satisfaire les besoins et les revendications des Amazighs et de maintenir les orientations stratégiques du pays ?, (ii) Quelles politiques adopter pour répondre à la matrice des droits linguistiques (United Nations, 2017) et culturels des Amazighs ? et (iii) Quels modèles de gouvernance envisager pour mieux gérer le rapport entre enjeux du vivre-ensemble et défis de la diversité au Maroc ?

Pour répondre à ces interrogations, il sera question d'abord de définir les défis de la gouvernance de la diversité culturelle et de rappeler les paramètres de la régionalisation avancée, avant de cerner ses limites ainsi que celles des initiatives récentes et de proposer quelques pistes de réflexion pour envisager une transition vers une meilleure prise en compte de la diversité culturelle.

Défis de la gouvernance de la diversité culturelle et paramètres de la régionalisation avancée

La gouvernance de la diversité implique une interaction entre les acteurs non institutionnels et institutionnels. Il y a trois niveaux à considérer : un niveau technique qui renvoie aux questions de gestion, d'aménagement et de planification, un niveau sociétal lié aux concepts de socialisation, de multiculturalisme et de patrimoine immatériel et un troisième niveau de nature juridique et politique qui recouvre notamment les droits linguistiques et culturels ainsi que les questions liées aux ressources et aux libertés confessionnelles.

Le concept de diversité proposé pour l'analyse du cas marocain vise à appréhender les spécificités culturelles et la pluralité linguistique communautaires dans leur rapport à la politique de gestion et d'aménagement de la question de la différence. En effet, on peut considérer que la pluralité linguistique[1] et la diversité culturelle[2] dans le cas du Maroc constituent des éléments saillants de l'identité nationale (Bennis, 2009) et sociale. La nature de la diversité au Maroc est sous-tendue par une dialectique axée sur les spécificités linguistiques et culturelles même si certains aspects de la diversité ethnique peuvent ainsi transparaître en surface. Or, dans la majorité des cas, la diversité culturelle et la pluralité linguistique constituent les fondements de la différence ethnique.

Un sentiment d'insécurité linguistique et culturelle peut se développer dans certains cas, et notamment dans le cas amazigh qui conçoit la langue et la culture du groupement dominant (l'Arabe), comme « la norme », c'est-à-dire, la seule norme prestigieuse et légitime selon un certain nombre de critères (religieux, politique, constitutionnel, institutionnel, culturel et territorial). Les retombées individuelles de l'insécurité linguistique et culturelle sont variées et s'inscrivent sur une échelle de discriminations psychoaffectives : une schizoglossie et schizoculture affichées à travers une contre-langue et une contre-culture, une crise identitaire incarnée par la dévalorisation de sa propre culture et de sa manière de parler, un malaise émotionnel et social *via* l'absence de bien-être psychologique à cause de défaillances communicationnelles dans des situations d'interaction sociale dans les tribunaux, à l'école, dans les lieux publics, dans les services publics, dans les médias, etc., et une iniquité sociale puisque le locuteur en situation d'iniquité « *hogra* » (Bennis, 2013) linguistique et culturelle est en manque de dignité communicative et tente d'imiter la langue et la culture « prestigieuse ».

Pour éviter la déperdition des identités linguistiques et culturelles, le cadre de la régionalisation avancée institué en 2015 semble constituer une alternative viable de l'opérationnalisation de la diversité culturelle au Maroc.

D'un point de vue local, le cadre de la régionalisation avancée se présente comme une vision territoriale de la démocratie au Maroc. Elle a été instituée en 2015 dans le prolongement des expériences de décentralisation précédentes, notamment celle de 1997 qui reconnaissait 16 régions administratives. À cet égard, le modèle de la régionalisation avancée conçu à partir de 12 régions (Commission consultative de la régionalisation, n.d.) répond apparemment au dessein de l'État marocain de mieux valoriser son offre politique dans le cadre du conflit du Sahara[3] en attendant l'aboutissement des négociations sur le projet de plan d'autonomie des provinces du Sud.

---

[1] A cet égard, la pluralité est décrite suivant deux dimensions différentes. La première opère au sein de la même langue : l'arabe au Maroc reconnaît une pluralité interne composée de quatre variétés régionales: *aroubi, jebli, mdini,* et *hassan* alors que l'amazigh s'appuie sur une pluralité à trois pôles régionaux : le tachelhite au sud, le tamazight au centre et le tarifite au nord. La seconde dimension de la pluralité linguistique se rapporte aux différentes langues (locales et étrangères) qui interagissent et qui sont en contact sur le territoire marocain : l'amazigh, l'arabe, le français, l'espagnol, l'anglais ainsi que d'autres langues étrangères.

[2] La diversité culturelle se présente comme un concept dont la signification profonde est intimement liée au spectre qualitatif des phénomènes culturels en question. A cet égard, le même modèle ou canevas culturel est reproduit à travers diverses « réalisations » et « accommodations » parsemant le territoire marocain. Ce qui peut être illustré par les différentes manières de préparer le couscous, ou la multiplicité de confections de la jellaba marocaine, la pléthore de manières de préparer le thé, le répertoire varié de ce qu'on désigne communément par chanson « chaabi » ou chanson populaire, … Partant, la diversité culturelle ne dépend pas du nombre de manifestations du modèle culturel en question mais elle est fonction de son essence et des modes de sa réalisation territoriale.

Le cadre de la régionalisation avancée matérialise le passage d'un État unitaire et centralisateur à un État à organisation régionale. Toutefois, il est essentiel de rappeler que l'État marocain demeure le seul dépositaire et garant des manifestations matérielles et symboliques de l'unité du territoire du royaume et de la nation. On distingue trois paliers d'attributions et de prérogatives : celui de l'État, celui de la région et celui des attributions et des prérogatives partagées. Ce nouveau modèle de régionalisation peut être considéré comme un modèle intermédiaire entre décentralisation et fédéralisme au sein duquel la région est définie comme étant une entité institutionnelle et fonctionnelle.

Par ailleurs, dans le cas marocain de régionalisation, le territoire a été promu au rang de vecteur des programmes de développement. Ce modèle se caractérise par une gestion de proximité. Le rapport entre l'État marocain et les 12 régions reconnues dans le cadre de la régionalisation avancée a été contractualisé et le rapport de tutelle s'est atténué. Cette nouvelle dynamique contractuelle a pour visée fondamentale l'émergence d'une nouvelle gouvernance territoriale moyennant une convergence et une bonne articulation entre le local, le régional et le national pour relier les projets de développements adaptés aux aspirations économiques, sociales et culturelles de la région. Pour sa part, l'État s'engage à faire valoir ce type de partenariat en créant le fond de mise à niveau social, le fond de solidarité régionale et le renforcement significatif des ressources des régions.

D'un point de vue administratif, le découpage a été soumis à deux règles, à savoir celle de la fonctionnalité et celle de l'homogénéité.

Les limites de la régionalisation avancée et des initiatives récentes

La régionalisation avancée est une étape en vue de l'épanouissement du paradigme de la diversité au Maroc et pour se diriger vers une territorialisation linguistique et

---

[3] Discours royal du 3 janvier 2010.

culturelle. Les fondements d'une telle réforme sont notamment les nouvelles dispositions en matière de langue et de culture contenues dans la constitution de 2011, et en particulier la reconnaissance de la constitution de 2011 du sous-composant culturel et linguistique arabe régional hassani.

Toutefois, la question de la place réelle du composant culturel et linguistique dans le cadre de la régionalisation avancée se pose. De même, il importe de s'interroger sur l'incidence réelle de la régionalisation avancée sur la diversité culturelle au Maroc et notamment sur la situation des Amazighs. Dans quelle mesure le découpage régional pourra-t-il satisfaire les aspirations linguistiques et culturelles des individus et des groupements communautaires ? Dans quelle mesure la régionalisation avancée portera-t-elle le Maroc de la logique de l'homogénéisation vers celle de l'hétérogénéisation linguistique et culturelle ? Quelle(s) politique(s) publique(s) adopter en matière de services publics (enseignement, médias, culture, encadrement administratif…) pour l'aménagement de la relation entre les aires linguistiques et culturelles d'une part, et les régions administratives prévues dans le cadre de la régionalisation avancée d'autre part ?

La régionalisation avancée laisse entrevoir une relégation des spécificités culturelles et linguistiques à un rang inférieur puisque la régionalisation avancée a été conçue dans une perspective administrative et économique instituant 12 régions sans prendre pleinement en considération les identités historiques, ethniques, linguistiques et culturelles des territoires marocains.

L'éradication des discriminations culturelle et linguistique par le truchement d'un processus de territorialisation culturelle est la clé d'une gestion positive de la diversité. Il faut signaler qu'au Maroc, la réalité de la gouvernance de la diversité culturelle est encore dans un état embryonnaire compte tenu qu'elle est encore à l'étape de la reconnaissance constitutionnelle. C'est pourquoi, la situation actuelle présage que l'étape suivante sera celle de l'expérimentation[4] et non celle de l'application.

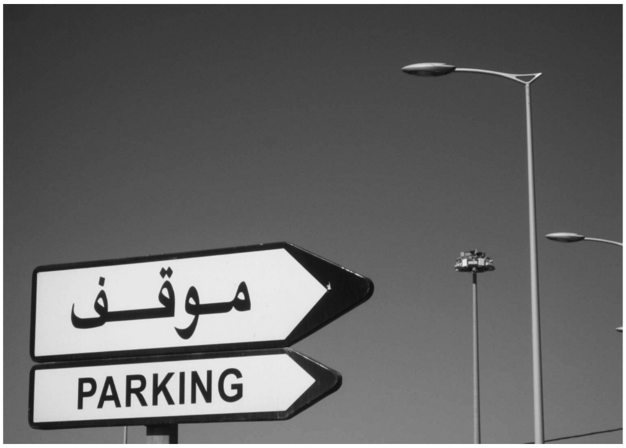
Parmi les initiatives « timides » dans ce sens, on peut signaler une approche hésitante et confuse vis-à-vis de l'identité visuelle officielle qui est passée d'un bilinguisme arabe/français vers un trilinguisme arabe/français/amazigh. Ainsi la signalétique officielle (noms des ministères et des instances gouvernementales…) est tantôt bilingue, tantôt trilingue avec certaines exceptions comme celle des panneaux de l'autoroute entre les villes de Khouribga et Beni-Mellal à travers lesquels l'État marocain s'adresse aux citoyens par l'intermédiaire des deux langues officielles (l'amazigh et l'arabe) et épouse ainsi l'esprit de la constitution de 2011 et reconnaît tacitement et officiellement le groupement amazigh sur la sphère officielle publique (images 1 et 2).

---

[4] La phase d'expérimentation peut être invoquée à partir de la circulaire du Chef du gouvernement datée du 28 juin 2017 portant sur l'introduction de l'enseignement de la langue amazigh dans certains instituts et écoles supérieurs comme mesure progressive et expérimentale de l'application du caractère officiel et institutionnel de la langue amazigh.

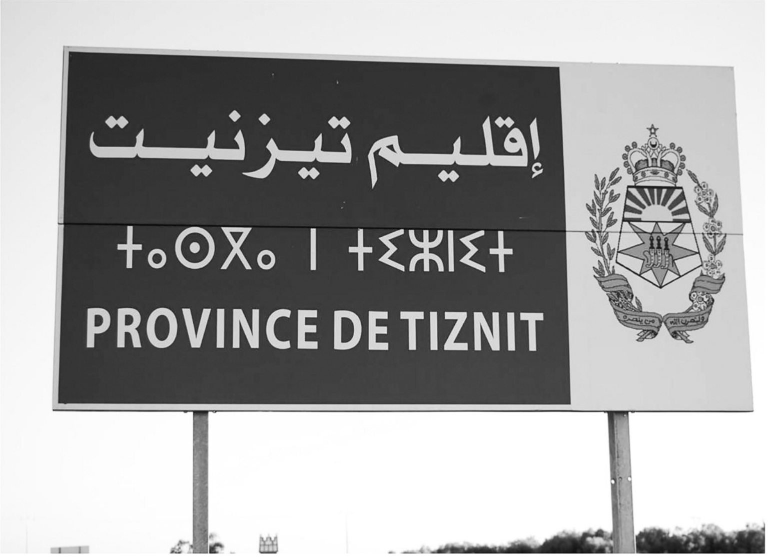
Une autre illustration de « cette timidité officielle » est le principe de l'entrée de la langue amazigh à la chambre des Conseillers signé entre cette dernière et l'Institut Royal de la Culture Amazigh (IRCAM) le mercredi 3 mai 2017 en vertu duquel l'IRCAM se chargera de faciliter l'usage de la langue amazigh au sein de cette institution parlementaire, de contribuer à la mise en œuvre du caractère officiel de l'amazigh et de surmonter les difficultés techniques liées à l'usage de cette langue au sein de la Chambre. L'IRCAM aura la mission de mettre à la disposition de la Chambre les différents systèmes informatiques et applications relatifs à la numérisation de l'alphabet amazigh (le tifinagh) et de sélectionner les ressources humaines spécialisées dans la traduction depuis et vers l'amazigh. Il faut rappeler que cette convention s'inscrit dans le cadre de l'application de l'article 35 du règlement intérieur de la Chambre des Conseillers, qui stipule que dans l'attente de la promulgation de la loi organique sur la mise en œuvre du caractère officiel de la langue amazigh, la Chambre peut préparer les conditions et les mécanismes logistiques nécessaires pour garantir la mise en application de ces dispositions au niveau des travaux de la Chambre.

Image 1. Bilinguisme arabe /français. Parking situé près de la plage de Rabat



En s'inspirant des expériences étrangères, deux principes peuvent être envisagés dans le cas marocain : celui de la personnalité (Parent, 2011) dont la finalité est de satisfaire les besoins linguistiques de l'individu (modèle du Canada) et le principe de la territorialité (Otis, 2006) suivant lequel l'individu est dans l'obligation d'employer et d'utiliser la langue majoritaire du territoire dans lequel il réside. Suivant ce dernier principe, la division territoriale coïncide avec la division linguistique et communautaire (modèle de la Suisse et de l'Espagne). En outre, dans le paragraphe 2 de l'article premier des dispositions générales du titre 1, il est énoncé que « L'organisation territoriale du royaume est décentralisée, fondée sur une régionalisation avancée ». Cette territorialisation fait référence à une approche écologique de la langue et de la culture qui sera opérationnalisée par la création d'une instance de gouvernance qu'est le Conseil National des Langues et de la Culture Marocaine (CNLCM).

Image 2. Trilinguisme arabe/amazighe/français. Panneau situé à l'entrée de la province de Tiznit



Le projet de loi organique dudit conseil s'appuie sur le postulat que la transition identitaire nationale est fonction de la gouvernance de la diversité culturelle et de la pluralité linguistique dans l'objectif de renforcer les valeurs d'appartenance et du vivre-ensemble et de bien asseoir les bases du paradigme de la citoyenneté au Maroc. Cependant, et compte tenu des retombées des conflits régionaux (par exemple la question kurde ou kabyle), dans quelles mesures les contenus du projet de la loi organique du CNLCM concourent-ils à satisfaire les attentes des communautés et s'alignent-ils sur les aspirations stratégiques du pays ? Les dangers et les menaces de la reconnaissance de la diversité culturelle et de la pluralité linguistique sur le système de la cohésion sociale peuvent être affiliés au réductionnisme identitaire (identité territoriale crispée : exemple du Rif), le chauvinisme linguistique (pour la langue arabe ou pour la langue amazigh), le conflit ethnique (Balanche, 2011) (entre Arabes et Amazighs), les propensions séparatistes (le hassani au sud du Maroc). La manifestation de ces dangers prend appui sur les préjugés nationaux déclinés sur les réseaux sociaux. En outre, il faut rappeler que les outputs les plus importants du projet de loi sur le CNLCM se résument dans l'encadrement du bilinguisme officiel constitutionnel et la normalisation du rapport entre le national et le régional, autrement dit entre l'officiel et le territorial. L'ultime fin du CNLCM serait d'instaurer une parité linguistique et culturelle entre le composant arabe et le composant amazigh dans les sphères de la vie publique et de contribuer à promouvoir le capital de la langue amazigh sur le marché linguistique marocain dans le but de parvenir à une équité entre les communautés.

Concernant la corrélation entre le national et le régional, le projet de loi du CNLCM prévoit quatre instances à l'échelle nationale : l'IRCAM, l'Académie Mohammed VI pour la Langue Arabe, l'Instance du Développement Culturel et de la Préservation du Patrimoine, et l'Instance du Développement et d'Usage des Langues Étrangères et réserve une seule et unique instance pour le niveau régional à savoir l'Instance du Hassani, des Dialectes et des Expressions culturelles. De plus, l'interpénétration des attributions de l'IRCAM et de l'instance chargée du Hassani, des dialectes et des expressions culturelles notamment au niveau des articles 14 et 15 portant sur la protection, la valorisation et la promotion des variétés linguistiques et des expressions culturelles locales implique à la fois une redondance dans les attributions et aussi une symétrie entre un composant majeur de l'identité nationale marocaine, l'amazigh, et un sous-composant du composant arabe à savoir l'élément hassani.

L'absence de critères fixant la nature et la qualité des déterminants (ethniques, historiques, linguistiques, identitaires, culturels, …) de la pluralité et de la diversité dans le texte du projet de loi amène à conclure que ledit projet de loi occulte la donne de la différence communautaire. La désignation du Conseil en question porte en elle-même à la fois la composante minoritaire, puisque le mot « langues » a été retenu dans sa forme plurielle, et la composante communautaire, vu que le terme « culture » a été engagé dans sa forme au singulier. Par contre, la mention claire et nette du sous-composant hassani représente une forme de discrimination positive qui constitue une menace pour une société de diversité et de pluralité. La hiérarchisation et la prédilection pour le hassani, motivée par la conjoncture politique (le conflit du Sahara) porte préjudice à « la diversité des subcultures » (Ammor, 2015) et aux autres sous-composantes humaines et culturelles régionales (*rifaine, jebli, mdini, tamazight, tachelhite, aroubi*) et qui suppose que le sous-composant hassani peut être considéré comme une culture et une langue différentes et non un sous-composant de l'arabe. Cette tendance infère que l'État reconnaît trois pôles communautaires, le pôle arabe, le pôle amazigh et le pôle hassani. La reconnaissance constitutionnelle et institutionnelle d'un nouveau pôle communautaire a été dictée par une vision politique s'inscrivant dans un processus d'autonomisation des régions du sud marocain (statut d'autonomie) pour contrecarrer toute velléité ou aspiration séparatiste.

Vers une réelle territorialisation culturelle

La gestion de la diversité culturelle et de la pluralité linguistique dans le cas marocain peut être opérée à partir d'une conception duelle de la régionalisation avancée reconnaissant une dimension linguistique et culturelle et un aspect administratif et économique. Cet aménagement peut être opérationnalisé à partir du principe de territorialisation culturelle. Ce principe a pour avantage de circonscrire les contours et les limites des régions à partir des caractéristiques linguistiques et culturelles du territoire. L'élément essentiel du découpage régional étant l'expression culturelle territorialisée.

De ce point de vue, le principe de territorialisation culturelle apparaît le plus à même de répondre aux fins posées par la constitution de 2011. Dans le préambule, paragraphe 6, 8ème engagement[5], il est établi que toute discrimination à l'encontre de la culture et de la langue doit être bannie, ce qui équivaut à une confirmation des droits culturels et linguistiques individuels, collectifs et régionaux (droits collectifs mais aussi droits de collectif).

Cependant, la stabilité du bilinguisme et du multiculturalisme ne dépend pas seulement des langues et des cultures en présence mais aussi de facteurs non structurels comme les moyens économiques et les ressources financières dont dispose l'État pour « opérationnaliser » la pluralité. L'État reconnaît le multilinguisme des régions mais ne peut pas supporter les dépenses nécessaires à la codification et à la normalisation des expressions régionales.

Il s'avère essentiel de proposer de nouvelles visions plus ouvertes et dynamiques pour dépasser la conception monolithique des langues et des cultures qui empêche le citoyen marocain, les groupements ethniques, les acteurs institutionnels, les différentes organisations de la société civile d'être traversés par d'autres cultures ou d'autres identités. Il s'agit aussi d'impliquer les régions et les collectivités locales dans

---

[5] « Bannir et combattre toute discrimination à l'encontre de quiconque, en raison du sexe, de la couleur, des croyances, de la culture, de l'origine sociale ou régionale, de la langue, du handicap ou de quelque circonstance personnelle que ce soit » (préambule de la Constitution de 2011, paragraphe 6, 8e engagement).

le soutien au développement de l'identité communautaire, des cultures et des langues du territoire et d'adapter l'enseignement des langues maternelles pour faciliter l'accès à la compréhension des concepts et à l'accomplissement affectif et intellectuel des générations futures. À cet égard, il semble essentiel d'approfondir le débat et le dialogue sur la nouvelle génération des droits linguistiques et culturels, à la lumière des dispositions de la constitution de 2011, des référentiels nationaux et des conventions internationales et de réfléchir aux stratégies à aménager afin de promouvoir la diversité culturelle, source de richesse humaine et économique et garantie de la paix sociale et du vivre-ensemble.

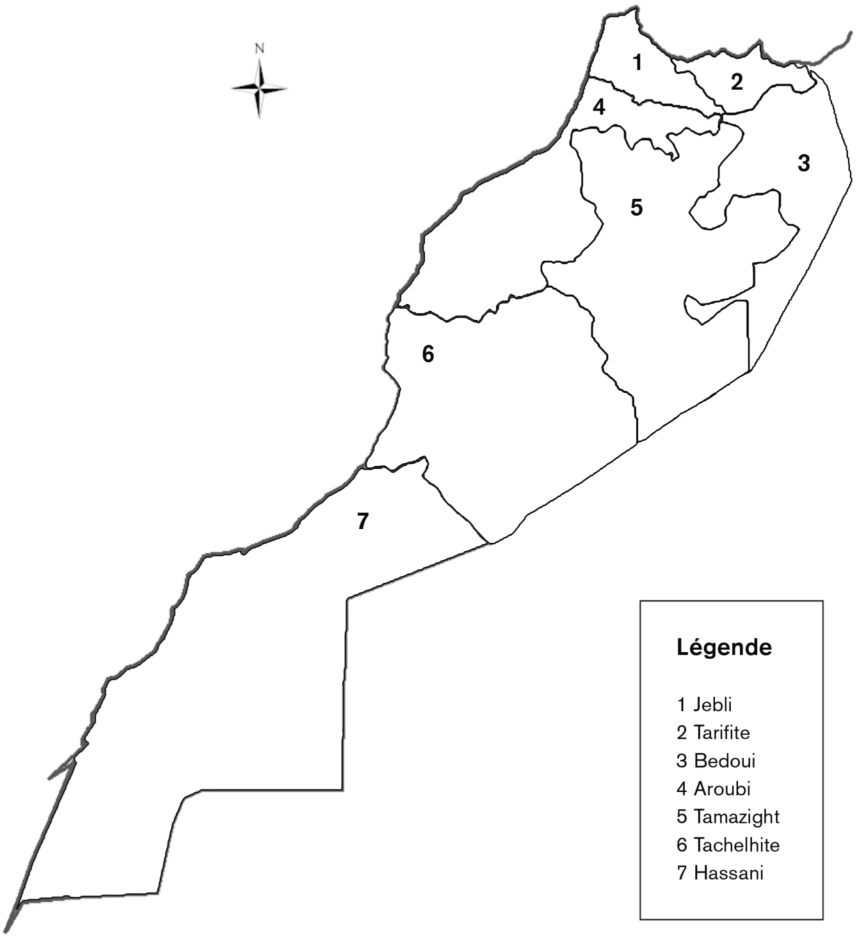
Le principe général sous-tendant l'approche à adopter pour envisager l'articulation réussie entre diversité et régionalisation avancée est que le local et le régional n'éludent pas le caractère national. Il semble aussi judicieux de rappeler que dans plusieurs cas (espagnol « Pays basque », canadien « Québec », français « Bretagne » ou belge « Flandre »), la logique de la reconnaissance de la diversité culturelle et de la pluralité linguistique a été promulguée afin de contrecarrer les élans de séparatisme et de conflits identitaires sur le devenir de l'unité nationale (Varacca, 2012).

Quels sont alors les scénarios viables de la gestion de la diversité culturelle au Maroc ? L'identité de chacune des régions éventuelles sera déterminée à partir de frontières culturelles permettant son éclosion et son interaction avec les autres régions dans un État adoptant la neutralité culturelle et linguistique. L'arabe standard et l'amazigh standard demeureront les langues officielles, les langues de l'État central et les langues de communication entre les différentes régions. Ainsi, dans le cadre d'une régionalisation avancée revisitée, le territoire de la région administrative et économique au Maroc sera englobé par celui de l'aire d'usage d'une expression culturelle ou d'une variété linguistique donnée. Au lieu d'instituer un découpage en 12 régions promu dans le cadre de la régionalisation avancée, le découpage régional pourrait ne compter que 7 régions éventuelles (Bennis, 2014) à savoir la région Rif (expression culturelle amazigh *tarifite*), la région Jbala (expression culturelle arabe *jebli*), la région aroubi (expression culturelle arabe *aroubi*), la région Andalou (expression culturelle arabe *mdini*)[6], la région Tamazight (expression culturelle amazigh *tamazight*), la région Tachelhite (expression culturelle amazigh *tachelhite*) et la région Hassane (expression culturelle arabe *hassani*). Cela peut être illustré à travers le passage de la configuration administrative, représentant les régions conçues dans le cadre de la régionalisation avancée, à la configuration culturelle proposée dans la carte n°1, distinguant une répartition des régions basée sur une territorialisation culturelle :

---

[6] Cette correspondance entre homogénéité territoriale et spécificités linguistiques et culturelles n'est pas toujours heureuse, le cas de la région andalou constitue un éparpillement territorial (Fès, Rabat, Meknès, Salé, Oujda).

Carte 1. Régions culturelles



Ce type d'aménagement ne pourra aboutir qu'à travers la création d'académies locales, d'instances et d'unités de gestion des ressources linguistiques et culturelles chargées de l'application de la politique culturelle à l'échelle régionale et la promotion et la qualification des variétés amazighs et arabes locales. En outre, on peut rappeler que l'article 5 se distingue par une volonté de répertorier les termes de référence de la politique linguistique et culturelle mais aussi de l'aménagement des rapports entre les langues reconnues par la constitution. Ces termes basculent entre « la mise en œuvre », « les modalités d'intégration […] dans la vie publique », « la préservation », « la protection », « la maîtrise des langues étrangères », « la protection et le développement des langues arabe et amazigh et des diverses expressions culturelles marocaines ».

Pour mieux décrire et analyser l'attitude politique à l'égard des régions hassane du sud, nous proposons le concept de « minoritorialité » opposé à celui de « minorisation » (concept qui renvoie à l'action d'amoindrir, de diminuer l'importance, de stigmatiser et de dévaloriser une communauté minoritaire) pour désigner, l'action ou le processus de discrimination positive amenant à valoriser et à élire un groupement au rang de minorité et de communauté en lui réservant un territoire dans le but de le gratifier d'un statut différent ou supérieur (au moyen de programmes de développements territoriaux, d'un niveau de vie prospère, de l'aménagement d'infrastructures modernes, de la création de villes et d'agglomérations urbaines, de l'octroi et de la création de postes de travail, de subventions étatiques pour les denrées de base, d'opportunités de logement, …) aux autres communautés en présence sur le territoire national. Le concept de « minoritorialité » se référera dorénavant au cas d'une communauté minoritaire autonomisée affectée d'un territoire développé et prospère en vue de son intégration au territoire national. Dans le cas marocain, la « minoritorialité » a pour raison l'intégration culturelle et l'implication politique de la communauté hassani au processus de récupération des territoires anciennement colonisés par l'Espagne puisque la diversité instituée par la constitution de 2011 a pour raison d'être la volonté et le désir de permettre à chacun de vivre dans sa différence.

Partant, l'adoption du principe de minoritorialité basé sur une territorialisation culturelle et linguistique reposera sur le fait que la gestion de la diversité culturelle induit une action politique affectant une expression culturelle et une variété linguistique locales à un territoire donné. Le composant culturel ou la variété linguistique reconnus pour le territoire constituent l'essence identitaire de la communauté en question. Les contours et les limites du territoire sont tracés conformément à la diffusion du composant culturel ou de la variété de langue en usage.

De ce fait, le principe de la minoritorialité, dans le cas marocain, ferait passer d'un découpage administratif et politique à un découpage communautaire linguistique et culturel : d'une région économique et fonctionnelle on passerait à une région dont les frontières coïncident et se confondent avec une aire communautaire et culturelle avec l'objectif de consolider l'appartenance marocaine, la réconciliation nationale et la solidarité avec le territoire national. Cette solidarité territoriale est délimitée par le nouvel environnement du paradigme de la diversité et de la pluralité contenu dans la constitution de 2011 qui justifie donc de réfléchir aux rapports entre régionalisation avancée et identité nationale à partir d'un découpage territorial basé sur des indicateurs linguistiques et culturels permettant de confirmer les différents constituants communautaires marocains.

Conclusion

Les principes de territorialisation culturelle ainsi que celui de la minoritorialité proposés pour la gestion de la diversité culturelle au Maroc peuvent représenter une approche qualitative de la dynamique minoritaire à partir du postulat que l'intégration territoriale est la base de l'intégration nationale. L'option d'une politique de territorialisation culturelle présente l'avantage de gérer le paradigme minoritaire, de reconnaître les spécificités linguistiques et les expressions culturelles locales et de désamorcer les tensions identitaires et d'intégrer de nouvelles perspectives du vivre-ensemble et du lien national. Cela permettrait de porter le projet identitaire marocain futur du constat de la différence ethnique et communautaire à la dialectique de la pluralité linguistique et de la diversité culturelle. En effet, la gestion du devenir des communautés ethniques, culturelles et linguistiques semble intimement liée à la citoyenneté, à la modernité et au développement démocratique.

Références

Ammor, F. M. (2015). Les transformations géopolitiques dans la région MENA: Les dynamiques structurantes. *Papers IEMed.* Barcelona : Institut européen de la Méditerranée. Retrieved from http://www.iemed.org/publicacions-fr/historic-de-publicacions/papersiemed-euromesco/24.-les-transformations-geopolitiques-dans-la-region-mena-les-dynamiques-structurantes

Balanche, F. (2011, October). Communautés, fragmentation territoriale et gouvernement au Proche-Orient arabe (Irak, Syrie, Jordanie et Liban). Paper presented at the international workshop *Les minorités et la question ethnique* (19-35). Lyon, France : Université Catholique de Lyon.

Bennis, S. (2009, July 20). The Amazigh question and national identity in Morocco. Arab Reform Initiative. Retrieved from http://www.arab-reform.net/en/node/395

Bennis, S. (2013, January 9). Société civile et nouveaux paradigmes conceptuels : le concept de ''hogra''. Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches en Sciences Sociales. Retrieved from http://www.cerss ma.org/new/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=279:societe-civile-et-nouveaux-paradigmes-conceptuels--le-concept-de-l-hogra-r&catid=86:article-bennis&Itemid=108

Bennis, S. (2014). La situation linguistique au Maroc : Enjeux de la gestion de la diversité. *Littérature Maghrébine et Comparée, Dossier pluralité linguistique et culturelle au Maroc,* 9, 33-44.

Bennis, S. (2016). Opérationnalisation du paradigme de la diversité au Maroc : vers une territorialisation linguistique et culturelle. In G. Grigore & G. Bițun (Eds.), *Arabic Varieties : Far and Wide* (119-126). Bucharest: Editura Universității din București.

Boukous, A. (2018). Essais de politique et d'aménagement linguistiques, 64. Rabat : Institut Royal de la Culture Amazighe.

Commission consultative de la régionalisation. (n.d.). *Rapport sur la régionalisation avancée.* Retrieved from http://www.regionalisationavancee.ma/PDF/Rapport/Fr/L1_ConceptionGenerale.pdf

Lecours, A. & Rocher, F. (2007, September 11). Le fédéralisme comme mode de gestion de la diversité : le cas du Canada et de l'Espagne. *Éthique publique,* 9, (1). Retrieved from http://ethiquepublique.revues.org/1788

Otis, G. (2006). Territorialité, personnalité et gouvernance autochtone. *Les cahiers de droit,* 474, 781–814.

Parent, C. (2011). Le Concept d'Etat Fédéral Multinational: Essai Sur l'Union des Peuples. *Diversitas,* 6. Bruxelles: Peter Lang.

United Nations. (2017, March). *Droits linguistiques des minorités linguistiques. Guide pratique pour leur mise en œuvre.* Geneva : United Nations.

Varacca, M. O. (2012, November 22). Le "printemps arabe" à l'épreuve des revendications amazighes au Maroc. Analyse des enjeux territoriaux et politiques des discours sur l'identité. *L'Espace Politique,* 18 (3). Retrieved from http://espacepolitique.revues.org/2504

EuroMeSCo

Founded in 1996 and comprising 106 institutes from 32 European and South Mediterranean countries, EuroMeSCo (the Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission) is the main network of research centres on politics and security in the Mediterranean, striving at building a community of research institutes and think tanks committed to strengthening Euro-Mediterranean relations.

The objectives of the network are to foster influential quality analysis and reflection on Euro-Mediterranean politics and policies; to serve as a platform for dialogue between the members of the network and key stakeholders to discuss the key trends and challenges on the region´s agenda; to increase the impact of think tanks and research institutes and to actively contribute to policy-making through dissemination of research outputs of the network to experts and national, European and international institutions linked to Euro-Mediterranean relations.

The EuroMeSCo work plan includes a research programme with five publication lines (Joint Policy Studies, Papers, Briefs, Spot-Ons and reports), as well as numerous activities, including annual conferences, seminars, workshops, presentations, formal and informal meetings with policy makers on the key political and security dynamics. It also includes communication and dissemination related activities (website, newsletter and targeted institutional dissemination) to raise awareness and promote the work of the network and to stimulate debate on Euro-Mediterranean affairs.

IEMed.

The European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), founded in 1989, is a consortium comprising the Catalan Government, the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation and Barcelona City Council. It incorporates civil society through its Board of Trustees and its Advisory Council formed by Mediterranean universities, companies, organisations and personalities of renowned prestige.

In accordance with the principles of the Euro-Mediterra nean Partnership's Barcelona Process, and today with the objectives of the Union for the Mediterranean the aim of the IEMed is to foster actions and projects which contribute to mutual understanding, Exchange and cooperation between the different Mediterranean countries, societies and cultures as well as to promote the progressive construction of a space of peace and stability, shared prosperity and dialogue between cultures and civilisations in the Mediterranean.

Adopting a clear role as a think tank specialised in Mediterranean relations based on a multidisciplinary and networking approach, the IEMed encourages analysis, understanding and cooperation through the organisation of seminars, research projects, debates, conferences and publications, in addition to a broad cultural programme.

ARI

ARAB
REFORM
INITIATIVE
مبادرة
الإصلاح
العربي

The Arab Reform Initiative (ARI) is the leading independent Arab think tank, founded in 2005 to articulate a home-grown agenda for democratic change. It operates on the principles of impartiality, social justice, and diversity. It conducts policy analysis and research, while providing a platform for inspirational voices. It is governed by a Plenary of its members and an Executive Committee.

ARI produces original research informed by local experiences and partners with institutions to achieve impact across the Arab world and globally. It empowers individuals and institutions to develop their own concept of policy solutions, mobilizes a wide range of local public intellectuals, scholars, media and civil society organisations, policy makers and activists from political and social movements in various Arab countries and generates policy recommendations addressed to political leaders.