

УДК 323.15 (53)(091)

ETHNIC MINORITIES AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN ARAB COUNTRIES**ЕТНІЧНІ МЕНШИНИ ТА НАЦІОНАЛЬНА ІДЕНТИЧНІСТЬ В АРАБСЬКИХ КРАЇНАХ****Harb M.,**postgraduate student, politology department,
V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University (Kharkiv,
Ukraine), e-mail: mustafa.harb07@gmail.com**Харбу М.,**аспірант кафедри політології,
Харківський національний університет
ім. В. Н. Каразіна (Харків, Україна), e-mail:
mustafa.harb07@gmail.com

This article explores ways to preserve national identity in Arab countries. It examines the strengthening of the movement towards the democratization of ethnic minorities in the course of performances against the existing political regimes, for national rights and freedoms in the Arab world. An attempt is made to reveal the attitude towards religious and ethnic minorities in a political discourse of the Arab countries, to find the liaison between the historical past and the present at an explanation of the reasons of discrimination of some minorities, to show political measurement of a problem of discrimination in cultural, social and psychological mentality of the Arab countries.

Keywords: Ethnic Minorities, Religious Minorities, Minorities Rights, National Identity, Identity crisis.

Ця стаття досліджує шляхи збереження національної ідентичності в Арабських країнах. Розглядається посилення руху до демократизації етнічних меншин в ході виступів проти існуючих політичних режимів, за національні права і свободи в Арабському світі. Зроблено спробу виявити відносини до релігійних і етнічних меншин у політичному дискурсі арабських країн, знайти зв'язок між історичним минулим і сьогоденням при поясненні причин дискримінації деяких меншин, показати політичний вимір проблеми дискримінації в культурному, соціальному та психологічному менталітеті арабських країн.

Ключові слова: етнічні меншини, релігійні меншини, права меншин, національна ідентичність, криза ідентичності.

(стаття друкується мовою оригіналу)

Actuality of the subject in this article stems from the problem of minorities in the world. It is one of the most important issues related to both political problems and social peace in many societies. History is full of intensive conflicts as a result of hatred to others. In the Arab world, the subject of minorities is hardly an issue in academic research despite on the fact that the Arab world witnessed sectarian and ethnic wars which lasted for many years, as in Lebanon (1975–1990), Sudan (1983–2005), Syria (2011–until today), Iraq (2014–2018), costing many lives and losses. However, many Arab countries are experiencing latent conflicts of minorities that have not yet exploded, and can express themselves in other forms at any moment. All of this did not make the issue of minorities a top priority in Arab thought, academia, research or even direct political action.

This article is aimed at an analytical study of the problem of minorities in Arab countries in a historical perspective while trying to understand minorities in these countries and find the link between past and present in shaping today's reality of these minorities and the reasons that underlie the motives for discrimination. The political dimension of the discrimination problem is based on cultural, social and psychological mentality in Arab countries.

The study of the subject of the article is based on literature that contains the works of G. Fuller, S. Sachs, Ch. Adam, P. R. Kumaraswamy, P. Seeberg, P. Pamir, C. J. Adams and others. They investigated the problems of cultural diversity in Arab countries and national identity issues of ethnic and religious minorities in the Middle East region.

The notion of minorities was not on a political agenda from time immemorial. With the creation of modern states, the questions of sovereignty and unity were the first concern and any talk about minorities within the state was viewed as a separatist call or a threat to the unity of the nation and the state. Even in old democracies, in Western Europe (say, France – the state with its democratic Jacobin traditions in governance), the issue of minorities was not discussed in public at that time, though it was proclaimed that all citizens were equal in front of the law and had the same rights and duties.

Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, signed in New York on the 16–th of December, 1966, states: «In States where minorities exist, minorities shall have the right to respect their rights. Ethnic, religious or linguistic, persons belonging to such minorities cannot be deprived of their right to cultural life, the dissemination and exercise of their religion or the use of their language with members of their group» [1].

Many UN international organizations, which specialized in the protection of human rights, have lobbied governments to protect the rights of minorities in many parts of the world. The first important attempts to identify the rights of internationally recognized minorities were through several treaties on minorities concluded under the auspices of the League of Nations. However, the United Nations had established a number of rules and procedures on minority issues and the 1992 United Nations Declaration on Persons Belonging to National and Ethnic, Religious and linguistic [2] is the primary instrument guiding the activities of the United Nations today.

In 2012 the United Nations published a Guide (Promotion and Protection of Minority Rights), which outlined mechanisms for focusing on the rights of individuals, belonging to minorities in a detailed manner, and for submitting complaints in the United Nations and other United Nations bodies such as the United Nations Development Program, the International Labor Organization, the African Union System, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Inter-American Human Rights System [3].

There is a great difference between political researchers on the interpretation of the term «minorities». According to our point of view, the minority is a group of individuals distinct from the rest of society, whether ethnically, religiously or linguistically and their members develop awareness of excellence in others in society. They are widely represented in Arab societies and characterized by the diversity of religious, sectarian, ethnic, national, linguistic and cultural features.

It's hard to define the term *ethnic minorities*. We'll concentrate on the definition that is almost

unanimously used because it was issued by the United Nations Sub-Committee on Combating Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. This definition states that groups of persons can be described as minorities when four conditions are met:

1. Numerical weakness compared to the total population
2. Situation that is not dominant within the State
3. Ethnic, linguistic and religious characteristics
4. Citizenship in the country of residence [4].

Roots of the case

The roots of the historical issue of minorities in Arab countries go back to the pre-Islamic conquests period. The emergence and spread of Islam from the Arabian Peninsula did not abolish other monotheistic religions and doctrines. Rather, the followers of these religions which included Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian population lived under Muslims rules and their rights were protected because the Islamic religion is a religion based on unification, unity and pluralism [5].

However, the schism that took place among the Muslims following the Battle of Siffin¹ [6], that was called a major sedition in the year 657, resulted in the emergence of new Islamic doctrines that deepened the differences between Muslims over time until it reached the issues of the same faith.

After the Battle of Safin came the period known in Arabic and Islamic culture as the Islamic Conquest period. It is known for occupying territories outside the Arabian Peninsula, spreading the new religion Islam across North Africa and the East coast of Africa, Spain, south East and Central Asia and until the area which is known today as Turkey. Wherever Muslims went, they left elements of Arab culture along with their religion. The cultures of the assimilated territories were not only influenced by the Arab invaders and their religion, but in turn, substantially influenced the nature of Arab culture [7].

Nowadays religious minorities in Arab countries make up a small proportion out of three major religious groups that arose in the cradle of the region – Islam, Christianity and Judaism. The most numerous religious minorities in the region are called Bahá'ís, Druze, Zaydies, Mandaeans, Shia, Alawite, Shabak, Maronites and Christianity. The Islamic religion is prevalent in most countries of the region, with about 20 percent of the world's Muslims living, mostly Sunni [7], followed by the Shiite community, as well as other small sects such as Ahmadiyya.

The concept of minorities is linked to many other concepts that are closely related to it, such as nationalism, ethnicity, racism and tribalism. Most of these concepts are rooted in the subject of minorities according to their national or ethnic classifications. And if we look at the Arab nation from the concept of nationalities and what emerges from them, we find that in the Arab society citizens are divided mostly into Muslims and Christians.

¹ Siffin: The battle that took place in 19/7/657 between the army of Ali bin Abi Talib and the army of Muawiya bin Abi Sufyan in a village called Siffin on the Syrian-Iraqi border and it was called as a major sedition because it led to the beginning of the emergence of new doctrines of Islam.

The Muslims are divided into two main sects – Shiite and Sunni, which in their turn are subdivided into many other sects. They represent the first group of minorities based on religious differences. The second group of minorities includes different non-Arab nationalities that comprise Kurds, Turkmans, Berbers, Armenians and others.

As for minorities of Jewish religion, they are mostly concentrated in areas of Israeli occupation, along with Muslims (most of them are Sunnis) and other religions such as Christianity, Druze, Baha'i and other minorities.

The spread of Christianity group accounts for 5 percent of the population of the Middle East, though at the beginning of the last century it was about 20 percent. However, foreign emigration of Christian believers from the region for various reasons, as well as the declining birth rate compared to Muslims, led to a decline in their percentage. Studies estimate that the number of Christians in the region, amounting to 12 million people, will decline by half or about 6 million, by 2020 [8].

Non-Sunni Islamic sects at the beginning of 1990s

Non-Sunni Islamic sects in the Arab world	Total no.	Century in which the sect appeared	Country of concentration
Shia Twelvers	10,000,000	7th-9th	Iraq/Lebanon/Gulf States
Zaydies	3,500,000	8th	Yemen/Arabian Peninsula
Ismaelites	300,000	8th	Syria/Lebanon/Iraq/Gulf States
Druz	1,350,000	11th	Syria/Lebanon/Palestine/Israel
Alawites	3,000,000	9th	Syria/Lebanon
Abadhi Kharajites	1,500,000	7th	Oman/Algeria/Tunisia
Total	19,650,000		

Source: Saad Eddin Ibrahim, *Reflection on the Question of Minorities* (in Arabic), Cairo: Ibn Khaldoun Center, 1992. Most of these figures are approximations, reached by two methods: (1) the last official enumeration plus the percentage of natural increase that is similar to the natural increase of the total of inhabitants in the countries where those groups live, for the years following the last census; or (2) taking the average of the maximum and minimum estimates mentioned in trustworthy references dealing with the topic.

Copts are the largest Christians in the Middle East, numbering between 6–11 million, although Coptic sources say the number is between 12–16 million. Copts concentrated in Egypt and Sudan, and minorities scattered in other countries such as Cyprus [9].

The religious diversity of the Middle East leads to a patchwork of ethnic minorities among Arab majority in most countries. The Arab countries meet under the unified name of the Arab world, but its population is not fully homogenous. Arabs constitute 88% of the total population (200 million people). Other minorities represented are Kurds in Iraq and Syria, Berbers in Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria, Africans and Turkmen, Christian and Jewish [10].

The great majority of citizens of Arab countries consider themselves and is considered by outsiders as Arabs. Their sense of Arab nationhood is based on what they have in common: language, culture, sociopolitical experiences, economic interest, collective memory of their place and role in history. But within the Arab countries, the sub-identities are mixed with the official national identity. The citizen identifies himself with his region, ethnicity, religion or sect, and in some cases his tribe, or the one coming from it, for example, south or north. In Iraq, the Kurdish component was the most conservative of the sub-identity and resulted from the problems of identity disputes that still exist today between the Kurds and the central authority of Iraq [11].

Many scholars asserted that the concept of national identity is complex and its intensity, character and

origins vary with time and place. It is a dynamic structure of affiliation, with strong foundations in the past but susceptible to change in the future. The establishment of the state depends on the existence of a common cultural heritage, which in turn assumes the existence of a common race in that state [12].

The Middle East as part of the international system has small groups of nationalities and minorities, and these minorities differ in terms of census and influence within the state. For example, the Alawite minority in Syria is in power, since Al Baath party take control of the political scene in Syria, although the Alawites represents only about 10% of the total population of Syria [13; 14].

Ethnic societies at the time of the former empires, which included different races, were usually responsible for managing themselves as they were during the Ottoman Empire [15]. But with the emergence of the so-called «nation–state» in the West, this concept spread in the independent Arab states. The priority of these new countries, such as Algeria and Iraq, was the establishment of a strong state with a national identity. However, for example the issue of Algerian or Iraqi identity collided with the issue of Arab identity, as Arab nationalism dominated in many Arab political movements such as the Baath and the Nasirite Arab nationalism [16].

But where is the place of the non–Arab population in the nation–state? This is still a problem for North African Arab countries, Syria and Iraq today. Arab nationalists want a state with a single national identity and consider the existence of minorities among them a sign of weakness in their state [17]. Since the colonial times in the past and until today they tried to use some of these ethnic or religious minorities to kindle the internal conflicts in the Arab countries in order to weaken their resistance to colonial rule and keep these countries under control. Ethnic minorities in the developing world were often viewed as a threat to the strength and unity of independent states.

However, with the emergence of ideas of democracy, human rights and the right to self–determination in the second half of the twentieth century, it became difficult to deny the right of ethnic or religious minorities to equality [18]. These minorities have begun to demand recognition of their identity and rights. But the authoritarian leadership fears the weakness of the state's power if it recognizes its minority rights or is asked to implement more democratic reforms [19].

The issue of minorities in any era in Arab–Islamic history has not been raised by the severity and gravity of these days. Recent decades have witnessed the emergence of many of these issues on the regional and international scene such as the issue of the separation of the State of South Sudan from the Arab Republic of Sudan in 2011. The minority was both religious and nationalist which made the situation more dangerous.

Here are some other examples. The issue of Kurds in Iraq and their demand for secession and the right to self–determination was clearly manifested in the referendum held on September 25, 2017. The Iraqi central government in Baghdad met it with total rejection, sent its military forces to northern Iraq and

threatened to take control of the Kurdistan region. That's why the Kurdish government had to refuse from their decision to secede [20; 21].

In addition to the Kurdish issue, Iraq has witnessed many acts of violence between the Shiite and Sunni communities after the fall of the regime of former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. Issues such as Copts in the Arab Republic of Egypt and religious persecution have emerged.

In the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Copts constitute a political minority that does not enjoy their political rights to the fullest extent, especially in the building of churches and the right to run for parliamentary elections [23].

The Amazigh community in Algeria is one of the largest minorities in the Arab countries, which faces a problem of identity. There were many internal clashes, especially in Algeria at various periods to demand the rights of the Amazigh and equality with Arabs [22]. The Amazighs seek to preserve their identity and culture especially in the form of teaching the Amazigh language. This demanded to demonstrations in Algeria with the claim to allocate money in the government budget for 2018 to support the use of Amazigh language.

Major ethnic divides of the Arab world in the early 1990s

Ethnic divide	Population (in millions)	Percentage	Country of concentration
1. The majority (Arabic-speaking, Muslims, Sunnis, Caucasians)	190.0	80.0	In all Arab countries except Lebanon, Iraq and Bahrain
2. Linguistic/cultural minorities (non-Arab)	32.3	13.7	Morocco, Sudan, Algeria, Iraq
3. Religious minorities (non-Muslims)	17.9	7.6	Sudan, Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine
4. Islamic minorities (non-Sunnis)	20.8	8.8	Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, The Gulf
5. Ethnic minorities (non-Semitic/Arabic/Caucasians)	8.7*	3.7	Sudan

Source: Saad Eddin Ibrahim, *Sects, Ethnicity, and Minority Groups in the Arab World* (in Arabic), Cairo, Ibn Khaldoun Center, 1994, p. 86.

Some national minorities living in the Arab world do not pose a threat to the security of Arab countries as their cultural heritage do not demand any kind of separation or independence (Turkmen, Armenians, Chechens and Circassians).

The real problems of minorities begin when they became a distinct political entity and constitute a political party and their own channels of power. Today most of Arab multi–ethnic states face the crisis of democratization, implementations of minority rights and the weakening of the central state.

It is desirable in principle to see all minorities fused in their communities. But even in the United States, these minorities find themselves not integrated into American society. In countries such as Algeria and Iraq, the minorities are less willing to give up their identity.

Today, with the increasing trend towards democracy, minorities seek to demand their rights and organize demonstrations for this purpose which create problems for the Arab governments and affect the election results. «While democracy is based on majority rule, it also implies respect for the rights and interests of minority groups. It is the lack of sufficient constitutional guarantees for minority rights, combined with discrepancies in economic conditions between different regions and ethnic groups, which has been

one of the principal causes of inter-ethnic tensions within and between states» [24]. Therefore, the Arab countries should consider the existence of minority identity for a better democratic future and have the necessary laws to provide their rights.

The problem of the existence of minorities, conflicting with the existence of national unity, is mainly related to the relationship between the society as a whole and the state which is supposed to represent the nation.

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