



## The War of Islam against Minorities in the Middle East

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The rapid and triumphal Islamization of the Middle East beginning in the seventh century, west to North Africa, north to the Caucasus, and east to China, is one of the most profound, permanent, and awesome conquests in history. This military and religious campaign welded a collective consciousness and constituted a political strategy whose primary concepts included: Muslim holy war (*jihad*), the Islamic territorial abode (*dar al-Islam*), and martyrdom (*shuhada*) on the one hand, juxtaposed to infidels (*kuf-far*), tolerated non-Muslim scriptuaries (*ahl al-dhimma*), and the non-Islamic territorial abode of warfare (*dar al-harb*). The mission of Islam was spearheaded by the “sword of Muhammad” in order to impose Allah’s last revelation over all mankind and throughout the world. Among the various methods employed, in particular in the Middle East terrain but not only, were deportation, colonization, conversion, repression, and at times massacre of native populations.<sup>1</sup>

The transformation of the broad Mideastern environment was a process of many centuries that culminated in the defacing and

refashioning of many lands and peoples. Byzantine Asia Minor, Armenian Anatolia, and much of Kurdistan, became Muslim Turkey. The Sudan as the land of Kush, Nubia, and Black Africa assumed an Islamic and Arab face. Lebanon's Pheonician and Christian heritage has been swamped by Islam and Arabism. Mesopotamia, Assyria, and part of Kurdistan were in the grip of Arab-Muslim Iraq. The pre-Islamic Berber/Imazighen/Kabyle character of North Africa struggles in the face of integralist and violent Islam. And Israel, reverberating with the Hebrew-Jewish legacy in the Holy Land, confronts the Islamic contention that Palestine is a sacred *wagff* domain belonging to the Muslims alone.

While the debate continues regarding the actual historical treatment meted out by Muslims to non-Muslims, Jews and Christians in particular,<sup>2</sup> the spirit of *our* times in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century is dominated overwhelmingly by Islamic fundamentalism linked to a comprehensive Muslim assault for glory and power. The names of Ayatollah Khoumeni (Iran), Osama bin-Laden (Afghanistan), Sheikh Hasan Nasrallah (Lebanon), and Hasan Turabi (Sudan), are some from among the heroic revolutionaries in the Muslim pantheon of iconic figures. Resonating into the boroughs of London, the arrondissements of Paris, and the neighborhoods of Jersey City, Detroit, and Chicago, Islamic movements and messages carve out their territory of influence in the quest for ultimate domination within the public domain of discourse and politics.

This is so in the remaining bastions of the (so-called) Christian West and with every greater immediacy and fury within and a bit beyond the Middle East. In May 1998, Libyan leader Mu`ammar Qadhafi declared that Jews and Christians hate Muslims and insult Muhammad, the prophet of Islam. In the light of this charge, and that by Saddam Hussein of Iraq that Israel defiles Muslim and Christian sanctuaries, the Islamic world is expected to take the road of *jihad* in order to achieve peace and justice in the world.<sup>3</sup> The *mujahid* bin-Laden, evoking the slogan of the "Great Islamic Republic" throughout the Middle East, repeated the militant refrain in Peshawar in September 2000, calling for war against Jews in Palestine and Christian Americans in Saudi Arabia.<sup>4</sup> A year later, the September 11, 2001, Islamic terror attacks in the United States brought home the seriousness and immediacy of bin-Laden's

intentions. His *al-Qa`idah* movement had struck ruthlessly at the political and economic centers of American power.

Meanwhile, attacks in the Far East against Christians and churches in Indonesia, and in Nigeria and the Ivory Coast in Africa, in the year 2000 signaled the scope of the Islamic offensive. The Pakistani "Army of the Righteous" stated the need for *jihad* against non-Muslims, especially Jews and Hindus, while the march of Allah's soldiers continued in Bosnia and Kossovo, Chechnya and Kashmir, Palestine and Lebanon.

Of special importance in this regard is the Christian character of Lebanon and the Jewish ethos of Israel as primary targets of Islam's war against the traditional infidel communities. In 1980, at an Islamic Summit Conference in the Pakistani city of Lahore, the goal was set to have the Middle East totally Islamic with the elimination of the Christians of the Orient and the Jews of Israel. This imperialistic if not genocidal intention appears high on the Muslim agenda until today, considering the pace and direction of events in both occupied Lebanon and *intifada*-infested Israel.

In an interesting development, the Tibetan Dali Lama condemned both Christians and Muslims in January 2001 for their practice of actively seeking converts. The non-aggressive religions of Hinduism and Buddhism apparently fear for their future. But it is evidently clear that the truly aggressive religion in this era is not Christianity, but rather putative and militant Islam with its explicit agenda of expansion worldwide.

Islam in its formative historical stage surfaced as a conquering and colonizing religious movement that arrogated public space and political power for itself alone. This serves as a model for reproduction in any future era thereafter, subject to the exigencies of power opportunities that are available to the Muslims. There are no fixed frontiers to delimit the scope of the future expansive drive, nor are there any moral or juridical restrictions in pursuing the war. Rather, the exaltation of battle by whatever means is designed to vindicate Islam's global primacy. The horrors of victory, perhaps for the victors and the vanquished alike, are tangential to the satisfaction of exacting tribute and earning respect from the cringing adversaries of Islam. In this scenario, the minorities in the Middle East are fated, as capitalists for Marx, to disappear in the dustbin of history.

## 1. *Dhimmis*:

### (a) Jews

Islam in its koranic and traditional self-consciousness considered the monotheistic religious communities of Jews and Christians worthy of no more than a “protected and tolerated” status under Muslim rule. However, with the modern political founding of a Jewish State of Israel and a predominantly Christian state of Lebanon, the normative hierarchy of power was overturned when the inferior, subjugated *dhimmi* minorities arrogated the right to govern themselves, and even to dominate Muslims as less-than-equal citizens in both Israel and Lebanon. An uncompromising Muslim response was deemed necessary, and certainly legitimate, to re-establish the primacy of Islam in these two Mideastern countries.

Both Pan-Arab nationalism and local Palestinian nationalism had rejected the Zionist claim to Jewish statehood in 1948 and developed a variety of political and military approaches to undermine and unravel Israel’s existence. Islam, though active in the pre-1948 struggle, emerged more recently as an alternative and yet complementary Palestinian framework of belief and dedication, mobilization and warfare, against the rebellious *al-yahud* of irremediable and obstreperous character. Though a majority in their land and state, the Jews of Israel would be reduced to their minority status in order to re-confirm Muslim primacy.

There were different ways by which the integrity of Jewish identity and the security of Jewish life were disparaged and denied in the past. Jews in Arab lands were considered at times no more than “Arab Jews” in a sweeping assimilative embrace. Living within the parameters of Islamic civilization seemed emblematic of Jews being virtual “Muslim Jews.” But the stridency of the modern Palestinian Muslim movements, with their doctrinal rejection of Israel and their violent mode of armed struggle, sharpened the active war of Islam against the Jewish people.

Modern Zionism, as the national liberation movement of the Jewish people, is defamed in the Muslim world as a colonial aggression and invasion that must be repelled by the defensive *jihad* of Islam.<sup>5</sup> According to the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement (*Hamas*) in Article 13 of its covenant, any concession of the land

of Palestine is a concession of the religion of Islam. This linkage of politics and religion is a central theme in classical Islam culled for active application. When the liberation of Palestine is achieved through *jihad*, the rule of Allah will descend and shape the moral and religious life of the Muslims, as the alien Jews will be defeated. Sheikh Ahmad Yasin of *Hamas* had stated in 1989 that “the solution [to the conflict] is a Palestinian Islamic state on all of Palestine where Arabs, Jews, and Christians will live under Islamic rule.”<sup>6</sup> This recalls the model of the *dhimma* (the apocryphal/historical Muslim pact with infidels) that dogmatically denies equality, dignity, or independence to non-Muslim minorities.

The outburst of *Intifada al-Aqsa* in September 2000 revealed the surging energy of Palestinian Muslims to confront Israel in a spirit of sacrifice and devotion, with hundreds dead and many more hundreds wounded in the first few months thereafter. Jerusalem, as the third holiest city in Islam, was the political target in this new phase of warfare. The *Aqsa* mosque situated on the Jewish Temple Mount (*Har Ha-bayit*), known by the Muslims as *Haram al-Sharif*, evoked a koranic image and the legend of Muhammad’s nocturnal visit to the Holy City. Sheikh Ikrima Sabri, Arafat-appointed *mufti* of Jerusalem and Palestine, called for “sacrifice until Allah’s victory” and considered the Jews as cowards. To liberate *al-Aqsa* at the cost of child martyrs is an honor to the parents of the *shuhud*.<sup>7</sup>

The Islamic ethos of warfare throughout Judea, Samaria, and Gaza, and even within pre-1967 Israeli borders as well, merged from within with the national Palestinian ethos of “armed struggle” (PLO Covenant, Art. 9). It also converged from without with the religious furor emanating from the Islamic Republic of Iran and its promotion of terrorism globally, the virulent Islamic hostility in Egypt to Israel, and *Hizbullah*’s *Shi’ite* victory against the Israeli army in south Lebanon, from which the IDF withdrew in late May 2000. In December of that year at a “Jerusalem Day” celebration in solidarity with the Palestinian *intifada*, *Hizbullah*’s Secretary-General Hasan Nasrallah referred to Israel as “a cancer that needs to be removed at its roots.”<sup>8</sup> The intense conviction of religious truth that fills Muslim hearts and minds bolsters the Islamic and Palestinian ambition of politicide against Jewish Israel. The Jews who survived

as a pseudo-tolerated minority have no right to assert themselves as a sovereign majority people.

For its part, Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority established in the context of the Oslo Accord from 1993 continues its animosity and rejection of Israel in the traditional Islamic idiom. The school texts used in the educational system in Palestinian-controlled areas, as in the towns of Ramallah, Kalkilya, and Hebron, portray Jews as "the enemies of the prophets and the believers," morally stained by "fanaticism" and "treachery," and committed to "racial discrimination." The Western Wall is not a Jewish site, but part of the *Haram* precinct, and the land of Palestine belongs to the Muslims and their brother Christians [sic].<sup>9</sup> The formal and written PLO commitment to peace with Israel was not followed by the promotion of a message of accommodation, respect, and co-existence. Israel, demonized as the predator and pariah from the past, remained castigated as the Palestinians' enemy even after the peace process was launched in Washington. War against the Jews characterized, as before, the new era of peace.

#### (b) Christians

The "religious and ethnic cleansing" by Islam of what once was the Christian Orient, or largely the Byzantine Orthodox Middle East, is but a euphemism for cultural and human genocide and the willful decimation of primordial native peoples. Once the majority population, Christians in the beginning of the 21st century constitute just three percent of the region's inhabitants, numbering approximately 15 million, facing more than 350 million Muslims in Turkey, Iran, and all the Arab countries. The religious and historical cradle of Christianity has long become the Muslim-Arab heartland, and even symbolic Bethlehem and Nazareth, which long retained Christian majorities, have succumbed to Muslim majority domination.

The basic trend among Eastern Christians in the 20th-century was immigration to the West. This population movement was stimulated by endemic physical insecurity, indiscriminate plunder, religious persecution, and political discrimination directed against virtually all the Christian communities across the region. In fact, the same forces of exclusion and oppression operate in the beginning of our 21st century as well.

- The Armenian genocide of 1915–16 by the Turks, which led to the death of a million and a half people, merits primary mention due to the scope of this horrific crime against humanity. The ancient Armenian people had become a small and vulnerable minority in its homeland. The historical nexus of circumstances and incompatibilities gave birth to a policy of deportation with instances of fanatical Muslim mobs crying "*Allahu Akbar*" (God is great), as they burned and butchered the defenseless Christians in the cities of Ayntab and Birecik.<sup>10</sup> Turkish nationalism and Islamic passion turned on the Armenians with a satanic ferociousness.
- The massacre at Simel in Iraq of some 600 Assyrian Christians — though Assyrian sources claim close to 3,000 were murdered in the immediate vicinity — in early August 1933 marked the denouement in the history of an ancient Eastern community. Claiming independence in the area of the Lower Zab and Nineveh area but promised only minority guarantees after World War I, the Assyrians were abandoned by the British to the new Iraqi regime, *Sunni* by religion and Arab by national consciousness.

Meanwhile, in the area of Tur Abdin in southeastern Turkey in the 1990s, Muslim fundamentalists under the name *Hizbullah* spread their net of terror, seized Christian villages, forced women to wear the veil, and murdered priests. Abouna Symeon, a monk, related that the Muslims say, "We should go back to Europe where Christians come from . . . as if our ancestors weren't here for centuries before the first Muslim settled here."<sup>11</sup> More recently, an Assyrian *Suryani* priest, Yusuf Akbulut, in Diyarbakir, was put on trial for calling on Turkey to recognize the Ottoman murder of the Armenians during World War I, and charging also that the Turks had used the Kurds to kill Christians.

Hiding the truth of the past has served in conjunction with destroying any future hope for the ancient Christian communities of the Fertile Crescent, across Armenia, Assyria, and Kurdistan, in the mountains of Hakkari and Urmia, in the valley of Sapna and the village of Amadiya. Assyrian refugees in London prefer to refer

to their lost homeland as “Mesopotamia,” recalling the Assyrian Kingdom from 612 B.C.E., rather than call it Iraq with its Arab-Muslim significance under the ruthless Baathist regime of Saddam Hussein.<sup>12</sup>

Under the mournful circumstances, the dream of a national revival and return can filter but in the recesses of Assyrian imagination while divorced from the political realities of the contemporary Middle East.

The Maronites of Lebanon, with a profound historical religious and national presence in the mountain stronghold of Bsharre and Zghorta, Jubail and Kesrouan, have been confronted by the resurgence of militant Islam in recent decades. Faced with Palestinian terrorists and Syrian occupiers, Lebanon’s Christians also struggled with Iranian-supported *Shi’ite* movements that, in particular *Hizbullah*, seek to establish an Islamic Republic. Sheikh Fadallah and other religious authorities consider the Khoumeini revolution in Iran a precedent, certainly an inspiration, for their spiritual and political aspirations in the “land of the cedars.”

The outbreak of Lebanese-Palestinian warfare in April 1975 began, appropriately enough in this Islamic *zeitgeist*, with PLO shooting at a church ceremony in the East Beirut Christian neighborhood of Ayn Rummanah, killing four Maronites. Palestinian massacres of Christians followed in 1976 in Damour, exhibiting gang-rapes and mutilated bodies, and in Ayshiyyah, exhibiting burnt bodies in the church. The fighting and slaughter continued, and hundreds of thousands of Christians fled the country. Beginning in the 1980s, *Hizbullah* conducted warfare against native Christians and the Israeli military presence in south Lebanon. When Sheikh Nasrallah’s own son was killed in battle in 1997, he expressed his paternal sadness but added that according to Islam, true life begins in Paradise with the martyr’s death.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, in the northern city of Tripoli, where the Islamic Unity movement (*Tawhid*) is active, the 90 percent *Sunni* majority harassed the Christian shopkeepers and pasted pictures of Muslim leaders on public walls.

Lebanon, constituted after World War I as a primarily Christian state, symbolized the strengths and hopes of Christians throughout the region. But the downfall of Lebanon in recent decades is

a sobering indication of the advance of Islamic power and Arab influence. Noteworthy in its irony, in addition, is the fact that both small Israel and Lebanon, as the two Western-oriented democratic countries in the region, and representing the Judaic and Christian civilizations in the ancient Orient, have been victimized by the forces of a ferocious brand of Islam. A popular Arab-Muslim refrain regarding the mournful fate of the Jews and the Christians threatens “first the Saturday people and then the Sunday people” targeted by Islam stalking its prey.

Egypt is the home of the largest single Eastern Christian community, overwhelmingly, of the Orthodox Copt church, that is estimated at over five million within a total population of approximately 70 million people. The spirit of Arab nationalism and Islamic revivalism have contributed manifestly to shaping the public domain as culturally inhospitable, discriminating in employment and political office-holding, restrictive in religious privileges and practice, and threatening the physical security of Christians.

Egypt has a deep Islamic identity, not only an overwhelming Muslim majority population, in a period of intense popular religious consciousness. The Muslim Brotherhood represents the sweep of Egypt’s national Islamic identity, and other militant and violent groups actively engage in escalating the tone in Islamic discourse. The constitutional amendment which in 1980 recognized that “the Islamic *shari’ah* [law] is the principal source of legislation,” and the assassination of President Sadat as a “heretic” by the *jihad* organization, were each in their own way acts that demonstrated Islam grabbing the political high ground in Egyptian society. The Christians, by implication, felt the increasingly suffocating and intimidating atmosphere.

The Copts of Egypt have requested that the state authorities grant them human and minority rights. But Copts have for many years been excluded from high political, administrative, and military posts. They have called for media broadcasting whose message would recognize their legitimate place in Egyptian life; but instead, public figures call for imposing the traditional *jizya* poll-tax on Christians, while Sheikh Omar Abd-el Rahman, of the 1993 Twin Towers bombing notoriety, reportedly issued *fatawat* to kill the Christians of Egypt.



The language of political oppression and linguistic doublespeak employed in Egypt, and then internationally, identifies Muslim assaults against Christians as mere “sectarian tension” (*fitna ta’ ifyya*) in a way intended to hide the identity of the aggressor and the victim.<sup>14</sup>

The starkest instance of recent years was the pogrom against the Copts in Kosheh and neighboring communities in Upper Egypt in late December 1999–early January 2000. What began as an argument between a Christian fabric merchant and a Muslim customer ended with the killing of 22 Copts. Chillingly reminiscent from other times and peoples was a rumor instigating the violence to the effect that Christians had poisoned the wells. In March it was reported that the Kosheh killers had been acquitted in court.<sup>15</sup> Traditional Islamic legalism frowns upon convicting a Muslim who injured or even murdered a *dhimmi*.

The condition of the Copts is deteriorating in all domains of Egyptian society. Other examples include attacks against churches, as at Kaser Rashwan in El-Fayoum province in August 2000, imposition of Friday and not Sunday as the day off from school as in the Christian village of El-Biadieah in March that year, forced conversions of Christians to Islam, and political intimidation of Christian figures like the patriarch of the Coptic Catholic Church to publicly support the Mubarak regime.

The Sudan in Black Africa, and its southern zone in particular, is the focus of another case in the war of Islam against Christianity in these troubled times. Since 1955, a civil war between the Arab-Muslim north and the African-Christian/animist south has left two million dead and hundreds of thousands of refugees in neighboring countries. In addition, more than three million Sudanese, overwhelmingly in the south, were at risk in the year 2000 from famine and drought. It was the proclamation of Islamic law in 1983 by General Numeiri, and the doctrinaire role of the National Islamic Front led by Hasan Turabi thereafter, that signaled the intensification of the life-and-death struggle for freedom and identity for the southerners. Headed by American-educated John Garang from the large Dinka tribe, the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement and its military SPLA wing, then renewed the guerrilla war against the Khartoum regime, in the hands of Gen. Omar

Hassan Al-Bashir since seizing power in 1989. The long war is largely forgotten by the world.

A complex web of cultural, religious, and economic issues sheds light on the longevity and horror of the suffering and struggle. The historical 19th-century slave trade in southern Sudan, conducted by unrepentant Arab traders/missionaries,<sup>16</sup> continues in the throes of present-day warfare with the government’s purpose to break the popular back of the southern rebellion and convert the captives to Islam. Abducted boys, uprooted from their native environment, are brought north to Khartoum and forced to become Muslims, while some are sent back to the south for missionary or military purposes.<sup>17</sup> The war in the south down to Equatorial province and Juba, the local capital, is unrelenting, with the Sudanese Army and its Muslim militias unwilling to tolerate an end other than the complete domination of the southerners, if not their physical — certainly cultural and religious — annihilation. We note that prior to the British withdrawal from Sudan in 1955–56 the south officially spoke English (not Arabic), had Sunday and not Friday as the day of rest, and freedom for Christianity was the dominant motif of the educational and religious milieu. But the independence of Sudan in 1956 signified the enslavement of the south.

The discovery of oil in the southern area of Bentiu complicated and exacerbated the north-south conflict, for it girded the military loins of Khartoum to preserve control over the region. Yet the SPLA, joined with Nubian and other opposition forces within the National Democratic Alliance, pursues the struggle in the area of Kassala in the east in an attempt to cut off Khartoum from its hinterland and then force a political settlement acceptable to southern aspirations and interests. Meanwhile, the program of Islamization and Arabization remains at the core of the Sudan government’s strategy, a policy of ethnic cleansing as Arab tribesmen push African inhabitants further south, especially away from the oil site of Bentiu. International oil interests and large numbers of Chinese security personnel stationed in support of the Khartoum regime bode ill for the southern struggle.

The vision of a new Sudan, as proposed by John Garang, is an idyllic image of a pluralistic country that recognizes autonomy for

the south, freedom of religion for non-Muslims, and national unity for the country as a whole.<sup>18</sup> But when land falls under *dar al-Islam* and is sanctified for Muslim rule, it is inconceivable that it would be voluntarily relinquished in a magnanimous act for conflict-resolution. Moreover, it is an Islamic imperative to expand into lands not yet populated by Muslims and transform them through mosque construction, religious conversion, and *dhimmi* subjugation. This is indeed the historical script and political prescription concerning the events transpiring in the Sudan during many decades of continued warfare.

## 2. Heterodox/Heretical Non-Muslims

### (a) *Alawites/Nusairis*

According to legend, a *Shi'ite* from southern Iraq called Ibn-Nusair fashioned a radical interpretation of Islam's origins and dogmas in the tenth century in a way that launched a new sect. His doctrine concerning the deification of 'Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law in Mecca, on the one hand, and the existence of a trinity of celestial powers on the other, stood in absolute contradiction to orthodox Islamic belief.<sup>19</sup> There arose, therefore, a new community of faith with highly syncretic features of Christian and pagan and perhaps Persian vintage, worshiping nature, promoting mixed dancing with unveiled women, as a schismatic *Shi'ite* sect set free from its presumably initial Islamic moorings. There were never mosques in the Nusairi mountain enclave in northwestern Syria, no sign of prayer, and no pilgrimage to Mecca.

This minority had apparently turned into an apostate community from Islam, and that act of heresy was met by hostility and rejection by the religious and political authorities in the Muslim East. A *fatwah* by Ibn-Taimiyya in the 14th-century considered the *Nusairis* an aberration and forbade to bury them in Muslim cemeteries or to eat meat from their slaughtered animals. In his view, the *Nusairis* were more infidel than Jews and Christians.<sup>20</sup> Efforts by the Mamluks and the Ottomans to have them accept Islam failed.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the *Nusairis*, now commonly known as *Alawites*, sought recognition for their separate identity within their own regional autonomous zone in Syria; and yet alternatively, depending on the political situation, they wanted acceptance from

the surrounding Muslim world. In 1936, the *mufti* of Jerusalem acknowledged *Alawites* as Muslims and later in the early 1970s, under far different political circumstances, *Imam* Musa Sadr in Lebanon declared that the sect is part of the *Shi'a* branch of Islam. This religious maneuver remained, we may assume, farcical in the eyes of the large Muslim *Sunni* population in Syria where Hafiz al-Asad, a son of the *Alawites* from the mountain village of Qardaha, ruled with an iron fist. The Muslims considered Asad's Baathist regime an atheistic anathema in the hands of a heretical minority dictatorship that represented only 12 percent of the Syrian population.

Events in Syria, like the massacre of 20,000 people in the stir of Muslim Brotherhood rebelliousness in Hama in 1982, illustrated the incongruity of *Alawi* rule over a society suffused with Islamic faith and Arab nationalist fervor. The fact that Asad, prior to his death in June 2000, was successful in transferring power to his son Beshar does not assure the long-term ability of the *Alawite* sect to impose its domination over the Muslims of Syria. The day of reckoning may come when Islam, as in its imperial past, recovers Damascus and the country from its apostate rulers from the mountain.

### (a) *Druzes*

The appearance of the *Druze* sect in early 11th-century Egypt was a manifestation of a *Shi'ite-Fatimid/Isma'ili* faith and regime that elevated the caliphal figure of Al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah to divine status. This fundamental distortion of orthodox *Sunni* Islam led to the persecution (*mihna*) of the new community, which then set its sights on acquiring a safe haven in the southern mountainous area of Lebanon, in Jabal 'Amil and Wadi al-Taym. The new *Druze* religion departed from Islam, though at times the adherents pretended to be regular Muslims (*taqiyyah*), but actually divorced themselves from Koran and *shari'ah* law. Religion had given birth to this new community, leaving the *Druzes* hardly more than allegorical Muslims, with monotheistic faith but without the doctrinal and behavioral paraphernalia of Islam.<sup>21</sup> The *Bani Ma'aruf*, as they call themselves, consider their particular monotheism within an existing monotheistic Middle East to be a special brand, as a philosophical and syncretic quality fills the *Druze* spiritual universe with a fragrance of depth, eclecticism, and unadulterated purity.

The history of the *Druzes* is one of an introverted, secret sect surrounded, and sometimes endangered, by the *Sunni* Muslim majority in Lebanon, Syria, and beyond. Their religious leaders (*Uqqal*) preserved the collective integrity of this small minority group and, with lay military chieftains, always fought attempts, as in the effort by the Ottoman Turks at the turn of the 20th century, to impose Islam upon the *Druzes* in the southern Syrian Hawran region. At a minimum, the *Druzes* were put under Muslim religious authorities even though they claimed that they are independent of the *shari`ah*.

After Israel's establishment, the *Druze* minority in the Carmel and Galilee areas was allowed to administer their own communal courts, no longer subordinated to Islamic law. This development was a result of the Jewish-*Druze* relationship which had begun in the 1930s, and reflected traditional *Druze* anxiety with *Sunni* Muslims, in this case the Palestinian Arabs. The *Druze* ended up agreeing to full conscription into the Israeli army. In the background of this fascinating military brotherhood between two small Mideastern peoples is the symbiosis in the biblical tale of Moses and Jethro his father-in-law, whom the *Druze* claim as their spiritual ancestor.

### (b) *Alevis*

This highly mysterious group, which may number as much as ten or more million people in Turkey, seems to be an offshoot of *Shi`ism* but with an extreme emphasis on the divinity of "Ali." Devoid of basic Islamic practices, like fasting in the month of Ramadan or mosque attendance, the *Alevis* reject *shari`ah* law and assume the proprietorship of an esoteric religious tradition, which may have absorbed Christian and pagan ideas. They also do not intermarry with *Sunnis* in Turkey.

When Muslim fundamentalism surfaced powerfully in Turkish society and politics, the *Alevis* cautiously maintained a low public profile. At the end of the 1990s, however, and though generally considered of non-Turkish ethnic identity, they adopted a more visible presence in Turkish cities and towns, erecting houses of worship known as *cemevi*, as in Ankara the capital.<sup>22</sup> They may consider that the constitutional character of Turkey as a secular republic will always buttress them while containing the challenge of Islam as a

rival political doctrine. This will then allow the wayward *Alevis* the opportunity to feel free to declare their religious identity without inviting any menacing Islamic response.

## 3. Non-Arab Muslims

### (a) *Kurds*

The imperial rule of Islam dominated Kurdistan and its millennial-old native Kurds in the days of the Abbasid caliphate, the Ottoman sultanate, and the Safavid dynasty, and so, too, under their successor states — Iraq, Turkey, and Iran — in later and contemporary periods of Middle Eastern history. In the heights of their rugged mountain hearth the Kurds, subjugated by the Arab conquest, accepted *Sunni* Islam but in a way that their core collective identity remained rooted in their particular cultural, ecological, and ethnic way of life. Religious and national identity are often fused, as for Eastern Orthodoxy and Russian identity, or Catholicism and Irish nationality. In the Middle East, Arab nationalism has a *Sunni* Islamic hue, as if to be an Arab is to be a Muslim, or to be an Iranian is to be a *Shi`ite*.<sup>23</sup> What then of Muslim Kurds?

The consequences of this linkage between nationality and religion are for certain minorities, like Muslim Kurds, harsh and fatal. Such a minority is, at one and the same time, denied any independent or honorable national significance while subordinated to the overarching religious community of which it is a member but that is dominated by another people. In the words of Firat, a Kurd, in a private communication from January 2001:

Islam is actually the main reason that the Kurds cannot unite [because they are nominal Muslims with other non-Kurd Muslims under the common faith of Islam], and one of the main reasons that Kurds do not have a country of their own [as they are subjected, as in Iraq and Syria, to the pan-Arab political framework].

Kurds were traditionally not considered mainstream, observant, and loyal Muslims by dominant Muslims like the Arabs. First, we have the exceptional case of the Yezidis in the valley of Lalish north of Mosul, with their pre-Islamic faith or apostasy from Islam, worshipping the peacock angel Melek Tawus, who as recently as the 1990s



feared the construction of a mosque in Dohuk, northern Iraq, as a sign of impending religious persecution.<sup>24</sup> Secondly, saint worship and holy shrines were more predominant than *shari'ah* conformity and mosque attendance for the Ahl-e Haqq Kurdish adherents, as in Kermanshah in western Iran. Thirdly, *Sufi* mystical orders, like the *Qadiri* and *Naqshbandi*, muted formal Islamic commitment in favor of spiritual and moral exercises. Fourthly, popular Kurdish culture, it seems, only tangentially conformed to Islamic norms and probably more often diverged from them, as eccentrically engaging in mixed bathing.<sup>25</sup>

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Kurds demanded and fought in vain in their pursuit of statehood as an expression of the surge of ethno-nationalism in their ranks. Conducting minority insurgency with great tenacity over many decades in Turkey, Iran, and Iraq produced, however, no political gain. With a fundamental denial of the very existence of the coherent ethnic-linguistic community of over ten million Kurds in the country, Turkey practiced a harsh policy of cultural repression and physical deportation. The indictment and imprisonment of sociologist Ismail Besikci became the *cause célèbre* in the struggle for Kurdish recognition in the 1980s. In Iraq, three million Kurds fought a guerrilla war under the charge of Mustafa Barzani, but the campaign collapsed in 1975. The variety of Kurdish parties/militias — KDP, PUK, PKK — continued armed struggle across the Kurdistan homeland, but division within and brutal repression without left the Kurds subjugated to the repressive states under which they live. In 1988, Saddam Hussein's forces unleashed the Anfal campaign to destroy his non-Arab Kurdish compatriots. The gassing of 5,000 villagers in Halabja became the symbol of Iraq's "final solution" policy against the Kurds. In 1992, in the aftermath of the Gulf War and the liberation of Kuwait from Iraq's clutches, the Kurds were able to establish a regional administration, but not more than that, with its capital in Arbil.

#### (b) *Amazighen* — Berbers/*Kabyle*

The struggle of the native *Imazighen* (especially Berbers in Morocco and *Kabyles* in Algeria) against the Arab-Muslim invasion of North Africa from the seventh and eighth centuries continued without interruption into the period of the contemporary state-system.

Based on an ancient oral language (*tamazight*) rooted in the historical geography of Kabylia, the Rif, and Atlas mountains in particular, preserving an indigenous culture of ethnic fidelity and customary law, this minority of 15 million people persists, sometimes rebels, but lacks independence and statehood. These Berber communities adopted *Sunni* Islam early on, but their commitment to the faith was traditionally considered weaker than love of their Berber hearth and their tenacity in maintaining Berber identity at all costs. They apparently lent money at interest, despite the Islamic prohibition, and considered saints rather than learned *ulema* the venue for sanctity and blessing.<sup>26</sup>

The Algerian war for independence from French colonialism (1954–62) found Kabylis, like Belkacem Krim, Ramdane Abane, and Hocine Ait-Ahmed, in the forefront of the armed FLN struggle. They dedicated their energies for a free Algeria that would accommodate the Berber minority, its language and culture, as a respectable component of the country's national profile. Instead, Algeria with a certain *jacobin* centralized apparatus was soon defined as an "Arab-Muslim" entity that conjured up an old-new cultural-linguistic colonialism. Furthermore, the connection between language and sanctity regarding the dominant role of Arabic as *the* state language marginalized the Berber tongue as a parochial folk fossil. It was virtually impossible to speak Berber in the Algerian public domain, though approximately eight to nine million speak it in their homes.

It was this repressive situation that led Mouloud Mammeri in the 1970s to initiate his struggle for legitimizing the Berber language and poetry as expressions of a revived culture. So, too, the courageous efforts of Lounes Matoub, who never felt Arabic to be his own language, to speak and sing in his native though stigmatized Berber dialect as an act of resistance. But Matoub, aged 42, was murdered in June 1998, perhaps by state security forces, perhaps by Islamic terrorists, with the civil war in Algeria raging since 1992, and targeting any and everyone.<sup>27</sup> Known for his anti-Islamist sentiments and proud Kabyle identity, Matoub once recalled how it was intimidating to utter a word in the Berber language on a bus in Algiers. He made an effort *not* to learn Arabic, and at his funeral the mourners chanted, "We are not Arabs!"

The Berber minority has been defiant in the face of violence and repression, demanding “democracy and culture” in a pluralistic ethnic Algeria. The people of Kabylia demonstrated in late April 2001 to commemorate the “Berber Spring” from 1980 in a proud act of ethnic self-affirmation. But in confrontations with the Algerian security forces, 30 unarmed youth were killed. The Berbers face both Islamic and state terror with terrible human losses.

In Morocco, where the Berbers traditionally enjoyed liberty in the rural Bled es-Siba areas, the war against French rule in the 1950s arose within a context of national and Islamic unity of the entire population. Yet independence meant the Arabization of Morocco in rejection of the French and Berber languages — even though the Berber proportion of the total population is estimated as high as 40 percent. The Alawite monarchy served as a unifying Arab-Islamic institution, and assumes this political pretension for the new king Muhammad VI, since his ascension to the throne in 1999. Inasmuch as the dynasty claims descent from Muhammad the prophet of Islam, and the king identifies himself in the classical caliphal role as “commander of the faithful” (*Amir al-Mu`minin*), he is a unifying point of reference for all Muslims, Arabs, and Berbers alike.

The implication of these aspects in contemporary Moroccan society and politics is the diminution of the Berbers’ status and their language in national life. Amazigh families in the south of Morocco have been displaced with Arabs, and *Amazigh* place-names have been purged and replaced with Arab ones. Only Arabic is an official language and it is even prohibited for *Imazighen* to record traditional names in birth registers. It is reported that many younger Berbers are not able to speak any one of their three *Tamazight* dialects which yet constitute one language, and that moreover the language is a handicap in the economic realm for which spoken Arabic is required.<sup>28</sup>

#### 4. Power and Rights

The treatment of minorities in Middle Eastern Muslim countries is part of a comprehensive strategy of exclusion, homogenization, and repression in the public and political arenas. Traditionally autocratic authoritarian regimes, from Algeria to Iran, engage in policies that deny or restrict human rights for all persons and peoples.

The regime rather than an active citizenry stands at the center of politics. It is often, though not always, the case that Islamic law or Muslim norms serve as a legitimizing pillar in the imposition of a single code of behavior that buttresses the regime.

In Saudi Arabia, where Islamic punishments (*hudud*) are applied, seven Nigerians charged with bank robbery in May 2000 were summarily beheaded.<sup>29</sup> In Sudan, whose penal code is inspired by *shari`ah* law, 19 men had limbs amputated for the same crime of bank robbery in late January 2001.<sup>30</sup> In the same period, the Palestinian Authority under Yasser Arafat executed two Palestinians (one in front of a large cheering crowd in Nablus) who were accused of collaboration with Israeli secret services. Beyond the aspect of judicial arbitrariness in the procedures preceding the sentencing, it is suspected that such punishments are the result of inner clan rivalries among the Palestinians and not necessarily the product of a commitment to Palestinian national solidarity.

In the domain of thought and culture, free-thinkers and public critics have been victims of government repression that reflects Islamic concerns. In the year 2000, Egyptian authorities arrested well-known human rights activist and scholar Saad al-Din al-Ibrahim on charges of fomenting divisions and tensions in the country due to his promotion of civil and minority, that is, Coptic, rights. He was later sentenced to a prison term. Author Salaheddin Mohsen, also of Egypt, was also sentenced to three years in prison in January 2001 because his writings were deemed offensive to Islam. These examples illustrate that Islam represents intellectual and political rectitude even though the government, headed by President Husni Mubarak, itself represses Islamic movements who use violence to achieve their objectives. Official Egypt, like monarchical Jordan, accommodates Islam, while at the same time containing its anti-regime animus.

While Islam is a powerful force of repression within Arab countries, it is also a catalyst for expansion and a virtual assault on the West beyond the Middle East. The decay of Christianity as a political civilizational entity, along with its porous democratic ethos, exposes Western countries to Islamic penetration in Europe and North America.<sup>31</sup> September 11 as a seminal rupture in the consciousness of the United States looms large in this regard. This

is of a piece with the vulnerability and weakness of Christian communities in the Muslim world. In the 19th century and even earlier, Russia, France, and Britain took an active interest in the safety and welfare of Oriental Christians; in the 20th century, national self-determination and decolonization served to liberate the Arabs and Muslims, but block the road for Christian minority freedom. The independence of Iraq and Egypt, among other countries, placed Arabs above non-Arabs, and Muslims above non-Muslims.

The halcyon days of European concern for Christians and even military intervention on their behalf, as with the French military expedition to Lebanon in 1861, vanished from the arena of practical politics. When the United States intervened in the Persian Gulf in 1990–1991 on behalf of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, it demonstrated its global and regional strategic priorities; and when it accommodated Syrian occupation of Beirut and almost all of Lebanon in the same years, it obtusely abandoned Christians (and others) to a foreign and oppressive regime. Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning the initiative of the American Congress in the 1990s to express concern for enfeebled Christians in the Middle East, and for Lebanon in particular, in declaratory and legislative decisions.

International organizations, particularly the United Nations and its agencies, have lacked the requisite determination and resources to assure the rights of minorities in the Middle East. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948 made no reference to “minority rights,” while the right to “self-determination” itself is judged inferior to the right of a state to maintain its national and territorial integrity. The rights of indigenous peoples have been recognized, but no country is agreeable to the notion that such peoples should enjoy the option of secession against the right of the state to assert its complete sovereign prerogatives over its entire territory. The Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, in Article 27, does acknowledge the right of minorities “to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language.”<sup>32</sup> Yet a centralized political regime, anxious about the majority-minority rift within the country, will not agree to grant extensive rights to a dissident group which might thereafter threaten the survival of the country. Nor are some states even willing to recognize the minority’s separate existence: Turkey traditionally called the Kurds “mountain

Turks,” while Egypt mockingly considers Copts a natural part of the Egyptian people and therefore unworthy of special rights or considerations.

The goal of freedom and dignity for all old Middle Eastern peoples is a noble vision. The most reasonable solution, however, may be one in which the state refrains from interference in the life of the minority so long as it recognizes the right of the state to its sovereign existence.<sup>33</sup> In the religious and political milieu of the Muslim and Arab Middle East, more than this — and even this — seems hardly feasible in the days ahead.

#### Endnotes

- 1 On the status of non-Muslims in the eyes of Islam, see Yohanan Friedmann, “Classification of Unbelievers in *Sunni* Muslim Law and Tradition,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, Vol. 22 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, The Hebrew University 1998), p. 163–195. For a general historical overview, see Bat Ye’or, *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam: From Jihad to Dhimmitude* (London: Associated University Presses, 1996).
- 2 A recent contribution to this historical debate appears in M.A. Muhibbuddin, “Ahl al-Kitab and Religious Minorities in the Islamic State: Historical Context and Contemporary Challenges,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (2000): p. 111–127.
- 3 The Associated Press, May 1, 1998, quoted in *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. VII, No. 4 (December 2000): p. 85; and *Jerusalem Post*, December 25, 2000.
- 4 *Pakistan Observer*, September 2, 2000; and a report from *The Copts: Christians of Egypt*, Vol. 17, Nos. 1 & 2 (January 1990): p. 3.
- 5 Sheikh Abdallah Azzam, born in Palestine in 1941 and assassinated in Pakistan in 1989, wrote a compelling *fatwah* (Islamic legal decision) on the subject called “Defense of the Muslim Lands,” (translated from the original Arabic) distributed on Internet site <<http://www.hoct.com/islam/defence.htm>>.
- 6 Ronni Shaked and Aviva Shabi, *Hamas: From Faith in Allah to the Path of Terror* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Keter, 1994), p. 112.
- 7 *Al-Ahram al-Arabi*, October 28, 2000, quoted by Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), Dispatch no. 151, November 8, 2000.
- 8 *Daily Star*, Beirut, December 22, 2000, quoted in the *Monthly Digest*, published by The Jerusalem Institute For Western Defence, Vol. 13, No. 1 (January 2001): p. 7.
- 9 Research on Palestinian textbooks is conducted by The Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace, and most of the above quotations are drawn from the Center’s Newsletter, issue 4, available on their Internet site <<http://www.edume.org>>.
- 10 See the authoritative study by Vahakn N. Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide* (Oxford: Berghahn, 1995), p. 147–151.

- 11 Op. cit., Dalrymple, p. 97.
- 12 Madawi Al-Rasheed, "The Myth of Return: Iraqi Arab and Assyrian Refugees in London," *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Vol. 7, Nos. 2/3 (1994): p. 199–219.
- 13 Nasrallah interviews in *Al-Safir*, Beirut, September 16, 1997, and *Der Spiegel*, October 20, 1997.
- 14 *Aequalitas*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (March-April 1999): p. 6, published by the Canadian-Egyptian Organization for Human Rights, Chomedey-Laval, Quebec. Note also from the CEOHR, "A Communication on Violations of the Rights of the Copts in Egypt presented to the Center for Human Rights-United Nations Office at Geneva," April 9, 1996.
- 15 Information from <<http://www.copts.com>> and *Cairo Times*, January 13–19, 2000, p. 6–8.
- 16 Alice Moore-Harell, "Slave Trade in the Sudan in the Nineteenth Century and its Suppression in the Years 1877–80," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (April 1998): p. 113–128.
- 17 Author's interview in January 2001 with an anonymous rebel referred to as Philip who fought in the bush with the Sudan People's Liberation Army.
- 18 John Garang, *The Vision of the New Sudan: Questions of Unity and Identity*, edited by Elwathig Kameir (Cairo: Consortium for Policy Analysis and Development Strategies, 1997).
- 19 Meir Bar-Asher and Aryeh Kofsky, "The Nusayri Doctrine of 'Ali's Divinity and the Nusayri Trinity According to an Unpublished Treatise from the 7<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> Centuries," *Der Islam*, vol. 72, no. 2 (1995): p. 258–292.
- 20 Rene Dussaud, *Histoire Et Religion Des Nosairis* (Paris: Librairie Emile Bouillon, 1900), esp. p. 29–30.
- 21 Silvestre De Sacy, *Exposé de la Religion Des Druzes* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1964, orig. 1838).
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- 23 Henry Munson, "Islamism and Nationalism," *ISIM Newsletter* (5/00): p. 10.
- 24 Christine Allison, "Oral History in Kurdistan: The Case of the Badinani Yezidis," *The Journal of Kurdish Studies*, Vol. II, 1996-1997, p. 37–48. See also John S. Guest, *Survival Among the Kurds: A History of the Yezidis* (London: Kegan Paul, 1993).
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- 26 *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. II (London: Luzac, 1927), p. 596–602.
- 27 On Lounes Matoub and his murder, see the Internet site of the World Algerian Action Coalition <<http://www.waac.org>> and the report in the *Washington Times*, June 29, 1998. In the Kabyle city of Tizi-Ouzou, Berber rioters destroyed public property in an outburst of collective anger.

- 28 Yamina El Kirat, "Some Causes of the Beni Iznassen Berber Language Loss," *Langues et Stigmatisation Sociale Au Maghreb – Peuples Mediteraneans*, Vol. 79 (Avril-Juin 1997) : p. 35–53.
- 29 *Guardian* (Nigeria), May 20, 2000, reported in the *Monthly Digest of News from the Moslem World* issued by The Jerusalem Institute for Western Defence, vol. 12, no. 6 (June 2000): p. 11.
- 30 The Sudan Victims of Torture Group (SVTG) of London reported this information on February 2, 2001, that was distributed by Internet site <<http://www.msanews@msanews.mynet.net>>.
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- 32 Patrick Thornberry, "The UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities: Background, Analysis, Observations, and an Update," in Alan Philips and Allan Rosas, editors, *Universal Minority Rights* (Finland: Abo Akademi University Institute for Human Rights, 1995), p. 20.
- 33 For a thoughtful discussion, see Anthony D. Smith, "Ethnic Nationalism and the Plight of Minorities," *Journal of Refugees Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2/3 (1994): p. 186–198; also my article "The Minority Plight," *Middle East Quarterly*, vol. III, no. 3 (September 1996): p. 25–34.