Minorities and the State in the Arab World

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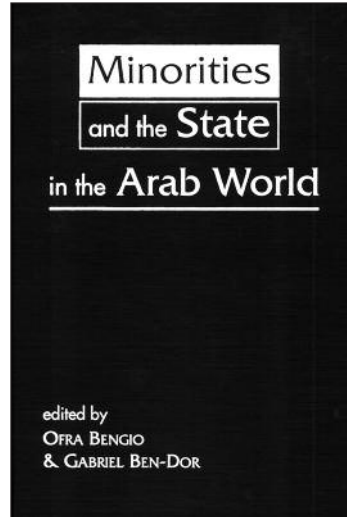
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Contents

1

Minorities in the Middle East: Theory and Practice

Gabriel Ben-Dor

The study of any given minority inevitably involves analyzing the structure of an entire society: either a minority is defined as such in relationship to a majority or the society as a whole consists of a collection of minorities. Minorities are as varied as there are cleavages in any given society, for example, men and women, old and young, more and less educated, employed and unemployed, and so on. However, the most relevant axis separating minorities from others in modern society is the ethnic one, and thus the primary tool for the study of minorities is the history and political sociology of ethnicity. There is a voluminous literature on this issue, divided into several major contending schools and approaches.[1]

Changing Approaches to Ethnicity

Three major approaches to ethnicity are ethnonationalism, ethnoregionalism, and ethnoreligiousness. *Ethnonationalism* deals with the attempts of ethnic groups to find a territorial expression at the level of an entire state, assumed to correspond to the needs and rights of the nation.[2] *Ethnoregionalism* challenges the powers of the nation-state by demanding greater local-regional autonomy for the ethnic groups or even looking toward a form of independence in the more remote future.[3] *Ethnoreligiousness* assumes an overlap of religious consciousness with some other characteristics of ethnicity—common origin, culture, or language—resulting in a form of ethnic activism that may or may not be territorially oriented but is of obvious political importance.[4]

Clearly some of these forms of ethnicity may overlap and reinforce one another. However, one should be aware that the very foundations for the political awareness and activity involved in ethnic relations are not only subject to different interpretations by the various participants in the political process,

but they also change over time. In other words, the structuring of ethnicity is a highly complex process, as dynamic as it is subjective.

The critically important question, therefore, is how and why ethnicity becomes a political fact of life.[5] Three major schools of thought provide different answers to that question.

1. *The economic and rational approaches*.[6] These derive from earlier times via Marxist theories, later modified by Emile Durkheim's sociological approach. The basic idea is that the process of economic development creates the larger communities at the expense of the smaller ones, and that the integration of the smaller and more distinctive units into a more extensive and inclusive societal framework is inevitable as the modern capitalist economy becomes a dominant fact of life in national and international society. A new variation on these themes is to be found in the rational choice approach prevalent in recent years.[7]

2. *The modernization approaches*. These assume that the process of modernization, as commonly defined in the 1960s and early 1970s, virtually creates new entities via the expansion of communication, the spread of literacy and education, the introduction of modern technology, and the intrusion of the idea of mass participation into the political process.[8] Early forms of modernization theory assumed that the creation of such new entities would also create new states that could overcome their premodern identities, much as Karl Marx and Durkheim had also assumed.

However, later and more sophisticated forms of modernization theory—what we may call the *modernization-conflictual* approach—pointed to the opposite possibilities, considered even more likely.[9] These scholars argued that the process of modernization generated and exacerbated ethnic conflict by changing the foundations of more traditional society, confusing issues of legitimacy, and introducing new resources into the arena of political competition. The uncertainties of a massive and manifold process of change, according to this way of thinking, provoke an escape into ethnicity as a form of assurance and safety against the risks and danger of modernity. In addition, those elites in danger of losing access to resources in an arena dominated by forms of competition they find unfamiliar and therefore difficult to control or manipulate tend to resurrect ethnic feelings and solidarity in order to turn them into critical political resources.[10]

Thus, political leaders who find it difficult to adapt to an ideological style of party politics may attempt to create tribal and ethnic parties to counter the ideological impact and legitimacy of their rivals. They inevitably cultivate feelings of pride, solidarity, and identity in the ethnic group they are using, even if such feelings have been long dormant.[11] When even broader groups feel deprived by the redistribution of economic and other resources under modernization, they may also resort to ethnic identity as a source of strength.[12]

3. *The primordial, or authentic ethnic, approaches*. These approaches assume that ethnic groups have an authentic existence of their own and are not merely figments of the imagination to be manipulated or used by leaders and politicians.[13] Such manipulation is indeed possible, but only when there is a strong objective basis for the existence of such a group, which might be revived or utilized in the political process.

More recent variations on this theme emphasize the developmental dynamics involved in ethnic politics.[14] Although an objective basis for ethnicity is likely to exist, ethnic groups themselves "are constantly created and recreated anew. In establishing the political boundaries of Asia and Africa, for example, the colonial powers redefined the size and the scope of the ethnic groups. The expanded political boundaries led to the assimilation and differentiation of ethnic groups: as old groups disappeared, new ones emerged while others simply merged and split."[15]

The authentic ethnic approach inevitably has to deal with the relationship of ethnicity to class structure, an intriguing question that goes back to the days of the Marxist school. According to Saul Newman, Donald Horowitz would argue there is something unique about ethnic identity. "Whereas individuals can overcome their social class and whereas social mobility is possible from generation to generation, ethnic ties are ascriptive. If one is born into an ethnic group, so be it; one cannot maneuver out of one's ethnic identity."[16]

A major contention of this approach is that ethnicity is indeed a comparative concept,[17] which is to say that ethnic groups are inevitably defined as much by their relationship to others as by their perception of any objective characteristics. There is considerable controversy over the implications of this thesis, yet little argument exists that the understanding of ethnicity must involve the psychological relationship between groups in a prominent way. As argued before, the study of minorities and ethnicity is by necessity the study of majority-minority and minority-minority relations as well.

Additional Theoretical Concerns

A particularly important feature of the study of ethnicity in the Middle East is the relationship between minorities and the state.[18] Because of the relatively late creation of states in the region and the difficulty of institutionalizing them in the face of manifold domestic challenges, the ethnic fact of life is particularly acute for the modern Middle Eastern state.[19] When the ethnic politics of minorities overlaps with sectarian-religious identities (at times within a given territory within the state), ethnic groups and minorities can become particularly troublesome. This is particularly true in states where the relatively new variation of nationalism leaves little room for the very acknowledgment of

the existence of minorities, which are perceived to challenge the might of the state not only by what they do but also by virtue of what they are.[20]

Although the Middle Eastern state has survived in an impressive fashion, in a harsh and inhospitable environment, it is far from secure. The recent emergence of radical Islamic activity, coupled with increasing ethnic consciousness, poses a new and potent threat to the legitimacy and viability of the state.[21] Yet these states have, so far, demonstrated a high degree of determination and skill in containing this potent threat. If anything, the responses to the recent challenges once again point to the institutionalization of the Middle Eastern state as the overwhelmingly influential fact of life in the contemporary political history of the region.[22]

The confrontation between the state and the new ethnic challenges constitutes one of the most interesting areas of study in contemporary Middle East politics. The authors included in this volume have tried to stress the notion of strategies developed and adopted by state authorities toward minorities, and the strategies utilized by minorities toward regimes and toward states. Although it is still too early to attempt a systematic classification of such strategies, the contributions of these authors help lay the foundation for such a theoretical attempt.[23]

In general, there are few Middle Eastern case studies that would constitute an accepted core of knowledge, based on detailed historical material as well as sound social scientific foundations. As argued in the impressive survey by Charles D. Smith, the historical scholarship has serious lacunae:[24] "However valuable as political history, these studies rarely examine the question of national and regional identities as compatible rather than as conflicting. Moreover, none of these works, with the exception of Bassam Tibi's, concerns itself with theories of nationalism or with the related topics of state formation and the historical and social-science literature pertaining to these subjects."[25]

Yet the social scientists are also at fault: "As for the social sciences, those who specialize in these issues appear to refer more frequently to the theoretical literature in journals of their disciplines than when they investigate comparable subjects in articles or books devoted specifically to Middle Eastern themes."[26] In other words, the historians do not use enough social science concepts, and the social scientists do not use enough concrete knowledge gained from Middle East history.

The present volume is intended to help rectify some of these deficiencies in the field. Editors of such volumes realize how difficult that tends to be. Ideally, there is a common theoretical framework that yields case studies that explore a more or less commonly accepted agenda, hence adding up to a coherent body of new knowledge.[27] In practice, it is neither possible nor desirable to coerce historians into writing questionable social science or to force social scientists into writing just as questionable history. Instead, the production of

this volume proceeded in stages that included a workshop where papers were given on the various cases by specialists in the history of the countries. This stage was then followed by the circulation of a theoretically oriented paper (by one of the editors, a political scientist who writes on Middle East politics), whose themes and concerns the participants were requested to address when revising their papers.

This procedure is not exactly the kind of theoretically driven agenda social scientists like to emphasize, nor is this the entirely free and individualistic set of historical studies that country experts seem to prefer. The resulting compromise has produced a series of studies centering around a number of theoretical themes:

1. The centrality of the state and the relations between the state and mi norities.
2. The plethora of strategies pursued by both sides in response to constraints.
3. The underlying assumption that while manipulation of identities is very much a fact of life, some form of authentic ethnicity also exists, a variation of the third approach to studying ethnicity described earlier.[28] The characteristics of each such *ethnie* and the dynamics of its political fortunes constitute much of the core of this volume.
4. The importance of the overlap (or lack thereof) of the ethnic characteristics of the minority: nationalist traits, religious awareness, common culture.
5. The sensitivity of Middle Eastern political systems to potential territorial challenges, hence the importance of the differentiation between compact versus diffuse minorities.
6. The importance of timing. We know relatively little about the point in the political dynamics of each country at which a minority undergoes a drastic rise in consciousness and the propensity for collective activity.

The authors explore a variety of domestic political and cultural factors that seem to be relevant, and they also pay attention to regional inter-Arab politics, as well as to such broader international developments as global trends and the regional activities of the Great Powers. Here, therefore, is the beginning of a set of insights and observations that may help generate a theory of timing in the rise of political ethnicity.

What now follows is an introductory exploration of some of the volume's key concerns: in the concluding chapter, the two editors will attempt to draw some preliminary conclusions and look a bit into the future. Thus, we will now consider the politics of primordialism (as a key notion in the third school

of the study of ethnicity), the differentiation between compact and diffuse minorities, and the relationship of ethnicity in the Middle East to Islamic radicalism (as the key contemporary issue in the politics of overlap or reinforcing cleavages). Included will be an analysis of ethnic and religious minority problems in Israel as a limiting case study, illuminating by way of comparison and contrast the features of the Arab cases studied in this volume.[29]

The introduction will conclude with a section that undertakes a preliminary exploration of minority problems in Sudan, so featured because, being the most extreme case of reinforcing ethnic cleavages that have led to a protracted and violent civil war, it also may be useful as a limiting case study, one that helps create checks against hasty generalizations from other cases. These introductory remarks on the Sudan—which have an explicit theoretical purpose—should not prejudice the detailed analysis by the country expert included in Chapter 4.

The Politics of Primordialism

The authentic ethnic approach to the study of ethnic politics—the one generally subscribed to by the authors in this collection—emphasizes both the dynamics of change in ethnic identity and consciousness and the more or less objective variables that define majorities and minorities, which tend to endure over time.[30]

Inevitably, the extent to which being a minority is relevant to politics is also a question of the nature of politics in the given society.[31] Not every potential cleavage in society becomes politicized, but sometimes that transition takes place with dramatic rapidity. One influential way to approach this issue is via the classic formulation of primordialism, which has been in existence since the 1960s and is now enjoying a revival, due to the movement away from both the simple theories of modernization and the complexities involved in economic approaches.

The theoretical approach of primordialism is rich and deep; it well deserves centrality in the study of minorities and ethnicity. The original formulation was proposed by Clifford Geertz in an article published in 1963.[32] Geertz, a prominent political anthropologist, argued the importance of primordial ties, those ties that one is born with. At the time, acting according to this inherited identification was considered less modern than the rational, secular, and ascriptive norms of a developed society.[33] This ethnocentric and simplistic approach has been largely abandoned; primordialism has proven to be extraordinarily vital in all societies, and there is no proof that it is particularly strong in any one part of the world.[34] The universality of primordialism is now generally accepted. It seems to be strongest in Eastern Europe with the

sociopolitical vacuum that resulted when old institutions and political communities broke down due to the revolutionary wave of the late 1980s and early 1990s.[35]

Geertz gave various examples of the meaning of primordial ties: links based on blood, kinship, religion, clans, presumed historical affinities, and so on.[36] Even though some of them seem to overlap and many appear only imaginary, this does not mean that they are somehow less real, for ideas in the minds of groups of people are political facts of life and are as strong as any objective factors.[37] Yet primordial identities are difficult to work with because they can change so quickly and can appear in surprising forms.[38] These transformations have occurred in societies undergoing rapid change, creating insecurity and thereby encouraging people to go back into their relatively safe shells at the expense of larger political communities. Primordial ties are simple to understand and appear to be permanent and trustworthy. By contrast, larger political communities are more difficult to live with, for they require some adjustment to seemingly artificial ideas and shared characteristics. The contrast in difficulty is readily comprehensible.[39]

Primordial ties are of different magnitudes. Thus, they may threaten to fragment the state either by trying to force it into bigger political communities or by fracturing it into smaller ones. In either case, they threaten the legitimacy of the existing state structures, and this is the fundamental importance that they have for contemporary politics.[40] In the light of political constraints, movements based on primordial ties rarely create states of their own, and when they do, they cannot be successful because they are practically never "clean" of minorities of their own. So we have no real examples of ethnic states in the Middle East and are not likely to have any in the future either.[41] Interestingly enough, even those ethnic groups referred to in the literature as "compact minorities" do not claim to establish states of their own.[42] On the contrary, they appear the most dedicated loyalists of the existing national states in which they wish to do well and even hold a large share of the power inherent in the machinery of the state.[43]

Compact Minorities in the Middle East

Compact minorities include primarily the 'Alawis and the Druze in Syria and, to a lesser extent, the Druze in Lebanon and even less in Israel. Their compactness lies in the fact that they occupy a well-defined geographical territory that makes up only a small part of the state and constitutes a comfortable majority in this region. Although there have been significant Christian and Jewish minorities in the recent history of the Middle East, they never have managed to capture so large a share of the power of the state as, say, the 'Alawis

in Syria today.[44] The past policy of the colonial powers certainly helped shape the situation of the 'Alawis, but the combination of space and demography was clearly a major factor in their fortunes.[45]

In general, colonial governments can make a decisive difference in the allocation of resources among minorities. In the case of Syria, for example, the heavy reliance on minority recruitment to the colonial army became a critical factor after independence, when the army became the most important political force in the state after the collapse of parliamentary structures.[46] In the case of Syria, the domination of the minorities may have to do not only with ethnic questions as such but also with such issues as civil-military relations;[47] then the takeover by the military creates minority domination as a by-product.[48]

So the model of the compact minorities in Syria is only one of several possible models, albeit perhaps the most interesting one because the compact minorities are the easiest to deal with in both theoretical and practical terms. Still, the fate of other compact minorities, such as the Druze in Lebanon, is entirely different: they have not been able to capture the machinery of the state, as the state is weak and such machinery is barely, if at all, in existence.[49] Yet the model of the compact minorities is a most useful conceptual tool for analyzing the problem across the region, and a great deal can be learned from such cases against the broader picture of the Middle East as a whole. First, we must ask in what sense the 'Alawis and the Druze are really minorities. They are both Arabic-speaking and not very different in customs and habits from the other Arabic-speaking groups in the state; they are clearly Arabs in a cultural and sociological, if not political, sense.[50] However, both are minorities in the religious sense, having evolved as offshoots of Islam, eventually to the point where they could no longer be considered Muslim.[51]

Clearly, in the case of the Druze the religion postdated orthodox Islam and involved movement from Egypt to the area of southern Lebanon, and then from parts of Lebanon to Palestine and later Syria.[52] From the eleventh century on, being a religious minority also meant being isolated demographically and geostrategically to some degree; it meant being based in the mountains and staying away both from urban areas as well as villages dominated by a Muslim majority. So the Druze developed a strong sense of tribal or ethnic solidarity, enhanced by skill in the martial arts, within a generally insecure environment in which the central government was neither able nor willing to protect such minorities.[53] Their history has led to a distinct ethnic identity, which has in turn witnessed a great deal of adaptability and fluidity in relating to external political forces, without compromising self-identity in any profound sense of the term.[54] It remains to be seen whether this pattern will continue in a more modern setting, in which the traditional patterns of geographic and social isolation may become irrelevant as well as impractical.

The case of the 'Alawis is simpler than that of the Druze. They were not involved in any large-scale movement from one part of the Middle East to another.[55] Although one well-known tradition holds that they are the descendants of one ancient Cana'anite people who came to speak the Arabic language only in medieval times, clearly, at least since the Middle Ages, they have followed the present pattern of being an Arabic-speaking group following a version of the Isma'ili sect of Shi'i Islam, and they have certainly not left their ancient land.[56]

The 'Alawis are a two-thirds majority in the region where they live in the coastal area of northern Syria and its continuation into Turkey. Although small groups of 'Alawis exist in Jordan as well as in Lebanon, basically this is a Syrian sect. The 'Alawis in Syria constitute some 75 percent of the 'Alawis in the Middle East at large, unlike the Druze who have major centers in both Lebanon and Syria, with a third center slowly evolving in Israel. Like the Druze, they also tend to live in mountain villages and emphasize the secret elements in religion. These two factors, secrecy and relative isolation in mountainous regions, have helped maintain a tribal solidarity and distinctness that many other minority groups in the Middle East have lacked. Historical circumstances in Syria led French colonial power to develop a preferential attitude toward these two minorities, which then institutionalized their role in the military, to the point of their later dominating the state elite under the proverbial army-party "symbiosis."[57] It is striking in this context that the 'Alawis, the dominant party in the alliance, have never exceeded one-eighth of the total population of the country.

It is worth thinking about the compact minorities in a broader regional context. Are they the exception that proves a rule, or are they a rule of sorts, and if so, why do we not see more salient cases elsewhere? One immediate example that comes to mind is that of the Kurds, by far the largest ethnic group within the Middle East that can be classified as a minority. Many of the characteristics of the Kurdish case seem completely to fit the model of compact minorities. They live in a number of countries (Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Syria) in areas where they are an overwhelming majority—in each of these cases millions of inhabitants reside in the given area of Kurdistan. (The exact demographic numbers are not known; sometimes the total number of Kurds is described as exceeding 20 million, sometimes substantially less.) The Kurds, like the Druze and the 'Alawis, also tend to live in rural mountain areas and also excel in the martial arts.

Unlike the Druze and the 'Alawis, however, the Kurds are clearly Muslims and Muslims of the majority tradition—that of Sunni Islam. However, the Kurds do not speak Arabic but an Indo-European language, akin to Farsee, which is written at times in Latin and in other cases in Arabic script. In terms of objective parameters, it appears that the existence of a separate language is considered by many scholars as being of decisive significance in

defining a distinct minority. In this sense, the "Arabness" of the Kurds is much more in doubt than that of the Druze or the 'Alawis, because they do not live in exclusively Arab countries but are also found in Iran, Turkey, and parts of the former Soviet Union that cannot be considered Arab. (Classic Arab nationalist theory itself put a premium on language as one of the most important characteristics of being an Arab.) Yet their being Sunni Muslim makes them part of the mainstream of the Middle East, so that they do belong to the majority in some ways.[58]

The Kurds can be considered a compact minority in places such as Iraq, where in fact they have tried assiduously to develop various models of political accommodation, some having to do with integration into the political life in the center, and some having to do with the ambitions for territorial autonomy. But the fact that the Kurds are spread all over the Middle East without a clear majority in any single country has made them different from other compact minorities. For example, their geographic spread has made it difficult for them to resolve their problems in any single country because other countries fear the power of precedent for their own minorities. While some have found it expedient to support Kurdish aspirations for reasons of their own raison d'être, others have opposed the Kurdish objectives for the very same reasons.[59] The fate of the Kurds in Iraq in the 1970s is a striking and tragic demonstration of the challenges of building viable, long-term relationships in a region fraught by abrupt change, often engineered by a handful of individuals.

Yet the Kurds resemble a nation in the theoretical sense perhaps more than any other minority in the Middle East, a fact that makes finding their place in the sun more difficult. One advantage that the 'Alawis and the Druze have enjoyed has been that—at least in recent decades—they have not been suspect of supporting potential nation-state alternatives, whereas the Kurds are suspected of doing precisely that.[60] It is more difficult for them to settle for the more modest objectives of the Druze and the 'Alawis because objectively they seem to deserve more, and they seem to possess much greater potential clout. So they are feared more. In the minds of many in the region, the Kurds are a threat not because of what they do but because of what they are. So herein lies an authentic tragedy of this people, which is the largest and most salient cross-national minority in the Middle East. Another obviously crucial factor in the fate of the Kurds was that they never enjoyed preferential treatment at the hands of the colonial powers.[61]

It is not easy to define the alternative to compact minorities, although such alternatives clearly do exist. For example, there are Orthodox Christians who live in various places in Syria, Lebanon, and Israel, and yet they do not enjoy a majority status in a given region, nor do they have a single center. They tend to be politically ineffective, as they lack all the advantages of other kinds of minorities. Their numbers do not make them really important; their

voting rights are not important either, as voting in general does not make a real difference,[62] and they lack the political punch of either a strong regional base or a strong connection with the instruments of power (such as the military).[63] This political weakness does not make them unimportant, for they still can leave their mark on cultural life and in business, as indeed was the case decades ago, and particularly with reference to the birth of Arab nationalism. However, as Bernard Lewis observed in the 1970s (in terms of "the Return of Islam," a popular phrase), the more Arab nationalism became accepted by the masses, the more it came to be associated with Islamic themes, a contradiction that the Christians have never been able to resolve.[64] The more they tried to pose ideological alternatives to Islamic politics (such as secular nationalism or socialism), the more those alternatives either became Islamicized or they failed—a classic case of "no exit."[65]

The case of the Coptic Christians in Egypt is somewhat different. Their numbers are significant, around 10 percent, and there has been an occasional upsurge in the level of their political consciousness and aspirations. They have vacillated between the traditional politics of a minority accepting its marginal role and a very assertive political style. The strength of the assertive style became a problem for the Sadat regime, which itself vacillated between two poles: first taking a conciliatory stance toward Coptic activism, later attempting to clamp down on the politicization of religion, an absurd claim in the circumstances of the Middle East. Given the strong Islamic flavor of mass politics in Egypt today, it is hard to see the Copts succeeding in asserting their collective role in politics as a semiautonomous community, as they lack the territorial attributes of the compact minorities, despite the existence of Coptic villages or neighborhoods.[66]

Theoretical and Comparative Implications and Considerations

In trying to assess the theoretical implications of the preliminary comparative analysis, it appears safe to say that there is a model of compact minorities, and that this model has its peculiarities that make it the most visible one. Then there is the model of the semicompact minorities, such as the Kurds, where the situation has been different, even though much of the same potential has been present. The opposite model of the noncompact or dispersed, *diffuse* minorities such as the Orthodox Christians (or the Jews in former times) is at the other end of the spectrum, and there is the case of the Copts in between, close to the diffuse model but not identical to it, due to larger numbers and partial demographic concentrations. So we have different ends of the theoretical continuum—the compact on the one hand and the diffuse on the other—and in

between something like semicompact and semidiffuse. This may be a convenient way to get at classifying them for purposes of analysis and comparison. Other variables have to be taken into account as well, including the definition of the majority, in order to understand better what constitutes a minority. As mentioned before, the definition of the majority is not always constant, and it depends on the self-identity of the political community at a given moment in history.

A number of scholars have observed that ethnic identity is malleable and that it can be manipulated. Stephen H. Longrigg, in analyzing Iraqi politics many years ago, coined the apt phrase "Kurds for ministerial purposes."[67] A person can discover his or her identity as a minority under the pressure of political processes, and someone can deny such an identity for any number of reasons as well. In addition, one can and does belong to a number of ethnic and other "primordial" entities at the same time, hence demonstrating what political sociologists call "cross-cutting cleavages." One can be a member of both the majority and a minority at the same time, or a member of several minorities. The results of such multiple belonging can be of different varieties. The classic theory in the West used to hold that cross-cutting cleavages are basically good for society because they moderate one another and thereby lay the foundations for a more pluralistic society in which several different competitive elements and principles coexist.[68]

This theory has been challenged recently in the West, and certainly there is little evidence to support it in the Middle East. Analysts will hasten to add another variable, usually referred to as the level of institutionalization.[69] This theory argues that the technique of building institutions (parties, unions, clubs, electoral processes, and a variety of formal organizations) makes a critically important difference in a country's political fortunes because only institutionalization enables a stable political system to function in an orderly manner, detached from the vagaries of ascriptive competition for resources. At the time this theoretical approach was born, in the late 1960s, the point was repeatedly made by its high priests that the Middle East was generally characterized by a low level of institutionalization, meaning that there were few political entities that endured due to their own strength rather than by being embedded in ethnic and tribal belongings and loyalties.[70]

This theory is still potent, although less popular today, and it does bear directly on the matter of minorities in the Middle East. First, minority identity matters more in societies where there are few complex and stable institutions, simply because the basis for political life and competition is more limited. This also helps to explain why ethnic questions in such societies tend to be more sensitive and lead to more violence. Second, the assets and resources that the given society has in attempting to tackle majority-minority relations are fewer when political institutions are weak, because there is a lack of integrative

mechanisms and even neutral arenas where different ethnic identities and entities can meet on mutually acceptable grounds. This lack in turn leads to suspicion and distrust of the existing institutions, which are considered to have been captured by one or more of the competing ethnic interests, thereby reducing their ability to forge political alliances that include a variety of interests and loyalties.

Third, minorities will feel that they can only protect their own interests by establishing institutions of their own or capturing existing institutions, which again make them suspect in the eyes of the majority.[71] All these factors lead to an extremely volatile political life in which the stabilizing influence of enduring political institutions is lacking, with debilitating results for the country. The only truly strong institution in existence is the state, and it becomes the focus of violent competition as the only institutionalized object worth capturing.

Analyzing some of these theoretical observations in the concrete context of Middle East politics, it appears that because there have been fewer institutions and alternative foci of loyalty in the region, ethnic strife between majorities and minorities has endured longer and with more potential for volatility than elsewhere, and this can and should be understood properly against the background of Islam and politics.[72] This is one of the most fashionable subjects in political analysis today, and the discussion that follows will not attempt to enter this general debate about Islam and politics but will make only some observations relevant to understanding the situation of minorities in the Middle East.

The centrality and overwhelming impact of Islam in Middle East politics are so well established that they need no further proof or documentation. However, the implications of these realities for various walks of life are not always properly understood. For instance, the relationship between Islam and ethnicity is a complex phenomenon, and obviously there are different varieties of this relationship in existence.[73] Yet in general it is safe to argue that Islam is not an ethnic religion, like Judaism. Being Jewish, as some Jewish writers have recently put it, is as much a matter of being a "member of the tribe" as it is a matter of practicing or even believing the tenets of Judaism as a religion. The more the modern variety of Jewish nationalism prevails in Israel and makes itself the overwhelming focus of loyalty among Jews in the world, the stronger this tendency, even though it may not be articulated quite so brutally. Evidently, this tendency also reflects the revolt of Jews against their patterns of living for many centuries, characterized by an extreme preoccupation with religious observance at the expense of political life. The other peoples with which Judaism had contact may have been religious in the past, but over the past five centuries they have become increasingly secular in

orientation, whereas Jews remained religious until about the middle of the nineteenth century.

As Yeshayahu Leibowitz has observed, until that time the notion of a secular Jew (let alone a secular Jewish community) was practically a contradiction. It has been one of the outstanding challenges of Jewish history since the mid-1880s to come to terms with the change in this definition and the resulting identity. One reason this redefinition has been so successful is that Jews do indeed feel a tribal kind of belonging, which has to a large extent compensated for the lack of religious content in Jewish life in most of Israel and much of the diaspora.

With Islam, things are much more complicated. Whereas Islam can be considered a political community that is far superior to any single nation-state, in practice it has meant following the tenets of the Islamic religion.[74] Although there have been cases of Muslims being forced to align themselves with their own political community by civil wars, as in Lebanon or Pakistan, or more recently in Bosnia, the Islamization of a political community has normally meant a higher degree of religious consciousness.[75] Building a Jewish political community has been basically the work of secular nationalists, long opposed by most of the religious establishment, whereas building Islamic political communities in recent times has basically been the work of religious Muslims, often working against the tenets and practice of secular nationalists. The identity of politics and religion is still a huge problem for those minorities in the Jewish state that are not part of the Jewish nation, as in the case of Israeli Arabs, but the nature of the Jewish polity presents an interesting contrast to the putative Islamic state.[76]

Because religion is not the sole basis of the Jewish community—many secular nationalists consider it a bothersome relic of the past—religion in Israel is often regarded as best left to the various religious establishments, which work more or less autonomously from the state. If anything, the secular nationalists resent this abdication of state functions to particular nonstate actors, and they argue correctly that this represents Ottoman traditions that are badly outdated at the end of the twentieth century. Basically, however, this arrangement provides a convenient way out for secular Jewish nationalism, because it allows both the Jewish religious establishment as well as the other religious establishments to function more or less to their own satisfaction while maintaining the Jewish character of the state via political and cultural domination. In this sense, Israel has no problem with religious minorities, only with political and cultural ones. The Jewish religious establishment is unhappy only because it has been confined to certain areas of jurisdiction, whereby most Jews most of the time are not under its influence.

Hence, the Jewish religious establishment desires more power over the Jews who are not under its jurisdiction, and has little interest in making non-

Jews obey any Jewish laws or tenets. It feels comfortable with the Ottoman tradition, and when secular liberal Jews argue against religious coercion, they invariably mean Jews imposing on other Jews, rather than Jews imposing on non-Jews. The struggle for the Jewish character of the Israeli state is over, at least in the sense that it is a Jewish state. Whereas the exact meaning of this term is unclear, in practice the issue has been settled, and the religious establishment at large has few illusions that it can make the state any more Jewish than it already is through religious legislation. The Israeli state is Jewish because it is populated mostly by Jews, who are in control of politics and who form the cultural elite that manufactures the symbols of living in the country.[77] Those who fall outside this realm of symbols, as do the Israeli Arabs, will always have great difficulty integrating into this cultural definition of the nation, but it is a Jewish state in this cultural-national sense and not in the religious one.

The situation is substantially different in the rest of the Middle East, however. In Lebanon, for instance, the character of the state is not settled, and the Muslim majority is not allowed to dominate political or cultural life.[78] Hence, the militancy of all groups concerned and their ambition to dominate the political center, or at least a share of it, by minimizing the impact of the other religious groups, often manifests through violence. Even if we grant that Lebanon is an exception, as a virtual "nonstate," the struggle for the future character of other Arab states is very much in progress. This struggle constitutes one of the main themes of the Islamic revival, which is so fashionable a subject in intellectual and political circles dealing with the Middle East today. One main theme of this struggle is the distinction between a state of Muslims and a Muslim state, a distinction that is in many ways the crux of the matter in any state claiming to have a religious character.[79]

Practically all observers agree that Israel is a state of Jews more than it is a Jewish state. As a result, there are few attempts to create a radically different way of running the state. Those models chosen for emulation are more likely to be the more successful industrialized nations of the West rather than from the past glories of Jewish history, real or imagined, or from any theoretical superstructure of Jewish political theory. This orientation creates a common language of normative politics in Israel and is a great equalizer between majority and minority, which strive for more or less the same image of the good state.

The situation is quite different in the case of the Islamic forces now so strong all over the Middle East. As the example of Iran demonstrates, the Islamists would very much like to create a state in their own particular image, one that not only differs from but is explicitly trying to defy the modern Western state. In this effort, they share neither a common language nor a common model with non-Islamic forces; and this idea of the Islamic state has the potential to threaten non-Muslims and cause a rift with them. At different peri-

ods in the brief history of the revolutionary Islamic republic of Iran, we have already seen grave threats to the Jews and the Bahais. This kind of threat may arise again and again against *all* non-Islamic minorities because, as the saying goes, this is the nature of the beast.

This struggle for the character of the state is still being waged in other states in the region, and the shape of the future state is still in doubt. We can imagine the threat posed to the Egyptian Copts, for example, if the Islamic forces are successful in capturing power in that country. That Egypt is a state of Muslims has already been determined, because 90 percent of its citizens are Muslims and because the Egyptian political elite—despite all pretensions and ambitions of modernization—has preferred to move in the circles of other Islamic countries. But what the forceful wave of Islamic radicalism in Egypt now demands is precisely to take that step toward becoming an Islamic state. No matter how it is defined, this transition will threaten non-Muslims in Egypt. It will inevitably introduce legislation based on the Islamic heritage, at the expense of the universal elements of the modern nation-state, which are more accommodating as far as minorities are concerned.

Hence, the Islamic revival does not involve a return to the "good old days" of Ottoman rule, with their delegation of authority to the different religious communities in a highly decentralized structure.[80] To the contrary, the present Islamic wave represents a bizarre juxtaposition of the centralized power of the modern national state (the very antithesis of the multinational Ottoman Empire), with the leaders' ambitions derived from the eschatological and nostalgic traditions of the Islamic heritage. Perhaps in the future, when there is a clearer definition of what an Islamic state represents, this juxtaposition might either disappear or be transformed in a way that will be congruent with the existence of non-Islamic minorities. For the time being the lot of minorities during the Islamic onslaught is bound to be one of uncertainty and apprehension. In general, Islam is expected to serve as social and cultural content for nationalism, in some ways substituting for the socialism of earlier times: after all, socialism is as alien to the Middle East as the modern nation-state. No matter how universalistic in nature and multinational in demographic terms, however, Islam has been used as the handmaiden of nationalism and not as an alternative to it.[81]

It is not possible to predict the future directions of the struggle for an Islamic state, let alone its outcome. Possibly the Islamic tide will abate, or else it may settle into a moderate pattern that will not threaten the political fate of the minorities. It is quite likely, however, that the present patterns will endure for some time to come.[82] The crux of the present situation may well be that Islam has not really challenged the dominance of the prevailing states in the Middle East. In other words, Islamists have not managed to present commitment to a broader Islamic framework, such as the proverbial Islamic Umma, as an alternative to existing states, notwithstanding the theoretical possibili-

ties inherent in Islamic frameworks. In practice, the Islamic wave has settled in most cases into an alliance between the nationalism defined by the loyalty to a single state and the broader loyalties such as Arab and Islamic sentiments as the overall framework of faith and values.[83]

Without a doubt, the resulting amalgamation is an uneasy one, full of tensions that are both logical and practical-political. Thus, the Iranian Islamic entity has fought with other Islamic entities in bloody battles and has tried to call on the Islamic loyalties of its own population. Because the enemy was also Islamic (although accused of having become secularized and unfaithful), the Islamic appeal was not sufficient in this particular case. Nationalist themes had to be mobilized, so that nationalism was virtually recycled, not in a pure form but one congruent with the Islamic character of the regime.[84] For example, the attraction of Shi'i Islam, the state religion of Iran, was mobilized against the Sunni character of the Iraqi elite.[85] The Sunni-Shi'i cleavage brings us back to the question of just what defines a minority in the Middle East.

Although there are many sayings to the effect that "the house of Islam is one," in practice this is far from true. The split between Sunnis and Shi'is has been such a central fact of life in the political history of the Middle East that it cannot be ignored. Do the Sunnis constitute a minority in Iran, and if so, does the term *minority* carry the same connotation as in the case of an ethnic-linguistic minority like the Kurds? If the reply is in the affirmative, then we have at least three definitions of minorities in the Middle East: ethnic, religious, and intra-Islamic. When two or more such cleavages coincide, we are likely to find a more serious problem with minorities, but normally in the Middle East this complication does not arise. Thus, the Kurds are an ethnic minority, but they are Muslims, albeit Sunni Muslims, which aggravates definitions in a Shi'i country such as Iran. However, the main theoretical question is how to treat the case of a country such as Iraq.[86]

We do know that in Iraq the ruling Sunnis in fact represent a minority of the population—the Shi'is have a numerical but not a political majority. In terms of political and cultural dominance, the urban Sunni elite has been very much in control since the inception of the modern Iraqi state. Yet we will rarely find a reference in the literature to the case of the Sunnis in Iraq as a minority, which they technically are, especially if we refer only to Arab, that is, non-Kurdish, Sunnis in Iraq. This failure is interesting, as it demonstrates that demography is only one of the elements that shape how we treat groups in society, and that other elements also enter the picture.[87] The Sunnis in Iraq are rarely if ever considered to be in a similar position to the compact minorities in Syria, even though there is some resemblance between them. If in the course of Iraqi history the Shi'is capture power and come to dominate the political center, it is possible that we shall indeed start hearing more references to the Sunnis there as a proper minority.

Elsewhere in the region intra-Islamic minorities definitely exist and are normally treated as such by scholars as well as politicians. The Shi'is in the various states of the Arabian Peninsula are but one example, and there are numerous others. Indeed, with the assertion of Shi'i self-confidence, backed by Iran, the salience of such minorities is likely to grow.[88] Obviously, the Shi'is are being increasingly politicized, and they are not going to be bought off easily by slogans of loyalty to Islam, because their brand of Islam is so different from that of the Sunnis: this difference has many political implications. Precisely because they are found within Islam, the intra-Islamic minorities may well enjoy the highest degree of legitimacy to be politically active as minorities and to differ from the norms of a given country. The implications of this kind of minority activity are not yet fully understood because the process is relatively new.

The Extreme Case of Sudan

Sudan represents an interesting and important case in the ethnic makeup of the Middle East.[89] It is one of the largest countries in the region, along with Saudi Arabia and Algeria, spreading over approximately 2.5 million square kilometers and stretching from the Egyptian border in the north deep into Central Africa. In terms of population, Sudan is split into two widely differing parts, an Arabic-speaking Islamic north, and a linguistically and ethnically different south, partly Christian and partly followers of traditional African religions. (They are hence considered pagan by the Muslims and Christians, though polytheistic is probably a more useful characterization.) Sudan has suffered from a very long and rather intense civil war between north and south almost from its very inception. This civil war seems to end every once in a while in a negotiated agreement, which then breaks down in short order due to the inevitable strains in the complex relationship of the two sections, with the underlying causes of conflict rarely being addressed in the various agreements.

The case of Sudan represents perhaps most clearly the divisive cleavages that underlie the entire Middle East. The main cleavage may be considered the religious one, which divides the Islamic community from the rest. This cleavage firmly puts the north in the family of the Islamic nations and the south in the family of black African nations. Others will argue that the main cleavage is the one that makes the north Arab rather than Islamic. In no other place in the Middle East can we see a major part of a country inhabited heavily by a population that is neither Muslim nor Arab. Moreover, this split is also territorial, which is to say that the non-Islamic, non-Arab population occupies a territory of its own, a territory that is relatively far from the political center of the country and hence difficult to control.

A comparison of this case with others in the region shows its uniqueness. There are significant numbers of Christians in Lebanon, with the Maronites having a substantial territorial concentration in a mountainous area that is difficult to reach. They are Arabs, however, and their acknowledgment of this identity forms a key part of the National Covenant. The Kurds are concentrated in several countries rather than one; no less important, the Kurds are Sunni Muslims, so that their ethnic-linguistic minority status is *not* reinforced by the religious factors that are so important in Islamic countries.[90] This case reflects the uniqueness of Sudan, whose potential instability is also exacerbated at times by the extreme factionalism of the majority Islamic-Arab population.[91] This case also resembles most the classic ethnic cleavages now ravaging such countries as the former Yugoslavia. Elsewhere, I have analyzed the possible benefits of a federal solution to the problems of Sudan, and indeed some such experiments with autonomy have periodically been made.[92] But we need to reserve judgment on this solution, as attempts to implement it have so far usually failed.

The case of Sudan exhibits another characteristic of many societies in the Middle East: extreme factionalism among both the majority and the minority. (Most estimates speak of a two-thirds majority and a one-third minority.) This factionalism has to be understood in order to comprehend the complexities of Sudanese politics. Yet factionalism at times inhibits finding a solution to ethnic conflicts. It makes it more difficult to find consensual support for models of coexistence and of course, in the case of the south, it makes for internal strife and violence as widespread as the conflict between majority and minority. This pattern, while seemingly extreme in Sudan, also exists in Lebanon and makes politics there that much more difficult to comprehend and manage, let alone transform to a higher level of stability. However, we do not have a theoretical explanation as to whether extremely factionalized societies tend to have more serious strains with minorities, or perhaps it is the other way around:[93] fragmented societies with minorities also tend to factionalize internally the majority and each of the minorities.[94]

Concluding Observations

As the analysis reveals, there are evidently many different kinds of minority situations.[95] A country that has no majority but only minorities is Lebanon. A large majority, with a clear minority situation, exists in Egypt. Syria has a minority situation together with a clear majority, although the majority is not in control of the political center. A minority dominates the majority and another very large minority in Iraq. In the Arabian Peninsula a clear majority dominates, but there is also a large foreign presence of alien workers along with strong intra-Islamic minorities. We have the case of Sudan, with a sharp cleav-

age between an Arab, Muslim north and a non-Muslim, non-Arab south. All
over the Middle East the cases fall more or less into one of these patterns.[96] We
are not able at the present time to generalize about all these cases. For exam-
ple, we are not able to state whether one pattern is more amenable to inter-
group accommodation than another, or whether one pattern is more likely to
lead to violent rivalry. But we are able to state that these patterns are not pecu-
liar to the Middle East as such, as they can be found elsewhere in the world.

It makes sense to assume that a large single majority is able to enjoy
more stable rule than smaller majorities, and it makes sense to assume that
multiple minorities are more difficult for a majority to handle than a single
minority.[97] Diffuse minorities constitute, as a rule, less of a political threat to
the majority than do compact minorities that have a territorial base; in fact,
this observation is one of the points worth elaborating upon in further re-
search. Land and territory seem to make a big difference in the impact of eth-
nic groups in the Middle East, and it remains to be seen how broadly this is
true. The importance of a territorial base has been recently observed in new
entities emerging from the ruins of the former federations of Yugoslavia and
the Soviet Union. Other examples are to be found in well-known cases of eth-
nic strife in Africa and Asia, from Zaire to Cambodia. One common denomi-
nator of these cases appears to be the territorial dimension that transforms the
putative minority into a concrete ethnic force.

National political patterns have to be considered against the patterns of
the status of minorities. We have seen that the Middle East has both compact
minorities and their opposite, the diffuse minorities ('Alawis as contrasted
with Greek Orthodox Christians, for instance), and it exhibits ethnic as
against religious distinctions: by religious, we mean the differentiation be-
tween Islam and all others. However, there is one further dimension, the dif-
ference between the varieties of Islam that are important enough to make the
groups involved also equivalent to majorities and minorities. Here again it is
difficult to theorize, so we shall only suggest some lines for future research
and analysis. For example, we may consider the hypothesis that in the fore-
seeable future intra-Islamic minorities are likely to gain further importance
because their legitimacy is going to be higher than that of other groups. The
lot of the Kurds in Iraq may improve, almost as an analogy to the former
colonial situation in other countries, where the colonial powers used to prefer
the compact minorities. The international support for Kurdish autonomy in
the north in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War may be a belated historical quirk
that functionally fills the same role as the older colonial preferences for com-
pact minorities in Syria. Obviously, this support is much less stable than the
old colonial one, but its impact for the future may still be decisive.

Many other elements and variables make a difference in the fortunes of
the minorities in the Arab world. However, the interplay of the main themes

referred to in this preliminary analysis—compact versus diffuse minorities, the nature of the primordial ties, Islamic radicalism, the colonial legacy—set the stage on which the continuing drama of Middle Eastern minorities unfolds. We hope that this background has respected the advice of Charles D. Smith: "Historians of the modern Middle East should be willing to question fashionable theories and to evaluate their relevance rather than assume an automatic congruence of experience based on terminology. Likewise, scholars in the social sciences should discuss their theoretical literature more fully in work on the Middle East."[98]

Notes

1. On the survey of prevailing approaches to the study of minorities and ethnic groups, see Saul Newman, "Does Modernization Breed Ethnic Political Conflict?" *World Politics* 43, no. 2 (April 1991), pp. 451–478; Donald D. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Joseph Rothschild, *Ethnopolitics: A Conceptual Framework* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981); Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Edward D. Tiryakian and Ronald Rogowski (eds.), *New Nationalisms of the Developed West: Toward an Explanation* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1985). The article by Newman is particularly useful in trying to classify and categorize the various approaches.

2. Variations of this focus have been the subject of the bulk of the literature in Middle Eastern history and politics. For a survey of recent works in this field, see the review article by Charles D. Smith, "Imagined Identities, Imagined Nationalisms: Print Culture and Egyptian Nationalism in Light of Recent Scholarship," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, no. 4 (November 1997), pp. 607–622. This is a review based on the survey of Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation, 1930–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). A large number of other works are instructive, and most of these are referred to in the Smith article. In addition, see, for instance, Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner (eds.), *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

3. For an instructive recent example along similar lines, see Nelida Fuccaro, "Ethnicity, State Formation, and Conscription in Postcolonial Iraq: The Case of the Yazidi Kurds of Jabal Sinjar," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, no. 4 (November 1997), pp. 559–580.

4. For a penetrating variation on this theme, see Fouad Ajami, *The Vanished Imam: Musa al-Sadr and the Shia of Lebanon* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986). Another interesting case in point is Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).

5. It seems that the most comprehensive treatment of this issue is to be found in Rothschild, *Ethnopolitics*. An ambitious attempt to explore the relationship between ethnicity and politics in the context of the Middle East is Milton Esman and Itamar Rabinovich (eds.), *Ethnicity, Pluralism and the State in the Middle East* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987).

6. See the good survey in Newman, "Does Modernization Breed Conflict?" pp. 453–456.

7. As exemplified in Ronald Rogowski, "Causes and Varieties of Nationalism: A Rationalist Account," in Tiryakian and Rogowski, *New Nationalism*.

8. See, for example, the essays in Clifford Geertz (ed.), *Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa* (New York: Free Press, 1963).

9. See, for instance, Walker Connor, "The Politics of Ethnonationalism," *Journal of International Affairs* 27, no. 1 (January 1973), pp. 1–21.

10. Extensive examples and items of the relevant literature are to be found in Gabriel Ben-Dor, *The Druzes in Israel: A Political Study* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1981).

11. Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975); Crawford Young, *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976).

12. This is one major theme pursued in Ben-Dor, *The Druzes in Israel*.

13. This is argued in sophisticated detail in the influential *Ethnopolitics* by Rothschild. However, the earlier and deservedly influential formulation is to be found in Clifford Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution" in Geertz, *Old Societies*.

14. See Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*.

15. Newman, "Does Modernization Breed Conflict?" p. 464, paraphrasing Horowitz.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. See the argument and the literature in Gabriel Ben-Dor, *State and Conflict in the Middle East: Emergence of the Postcolonial State* (New York: Praeger, 1983) and Ben-Dor, "Ethnopolitics and the Middle Eastern State," in Esman and Rabinovich, *Ethnicity, Pluralism and the State*.

19. See Bassam Tibi, "Old Tribes and Imposed Nation-States in the Modern Middle East," in Khoury and Kostiner, *Tribes and State Formation*.

20. Many instructive examples are referred to in the useful review by Charles D. Smith, "Imagined Identities, Imagined Nationalisms." This survey also contains a rather extensive bibliography of the literature relevant to this argument. See also the example of Egypt as analyzed by Sa'd al-Din Ibrahim, referred to later in this volume.

21. There is, as is well known, a most extensive literature on this. For one instructive set of insights and examples, see Bruce Maddy-Weitzman and Efraim Inbar (eds.), *Religious Radicalism in the Greater Middle East* (London: Frank Cass, 1997).

22. This point is argued in great detail in Gabriel Ben-Dor, "Stateness and Ideology in Contemporary Middle Eastern Politics," *The Jerusalem Journal of International Relations* 9, no. 3 (September 1987), pp. 10–37.

23. A good example of how such historical knowledge may crystallize into the understanding of state strategies is to be found in the classic by Reinhard Bendix, *Nation-Building and Citizenship: Studies of Our Changing Social Order* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964). For the more general argument see Theda Skocpol and Margaret Somers, "The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Theory," *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* 22 (1980), pp. 174–197.

24. Smith, "Imagined Identities," p. 608.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid. Smith points to "important exceptions" to this general criticism and includes Ben-Dor's *State and Conflict in the Middle East* among them.

27. For some of the classic dilemmas of using case studies in the study of politics, see Harry Eckstein, "Case Study and Theory in Political Science," in Fred I. Green-

stein and Nelson W. Polsby (eds.), *Handbook of Political Science, Strategies of Inquiry,* vol. 7 (Reading, Mass.: Addison Wesley, 1975), pp. 80–104; Arend Lijphart, "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method," *The American Political Science Review* 65, no. 3 (September 1971), pp. 682–693; and Joseph LaPalombara, "Macrotheories and Microapplications in Comparative Politics: A Widening Chasm," *Comparative Politics* 1, no. 1 (October 1968), pp. 52–78.

28. This concept, referring to a "real ethnic core," derives from the work of Anthony Smith, quoted in Charles D. Smith, "Imagined Identities," p. 609. See the original formulation in Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

29. As it turns out, the contrast between the two also masks surprising similarities, a contrast that calls to mind Raymond Aron's famous remark that the heart of social science lies in the edict: "See the dissimilar in that which appears similar, and seek the similar in that which appears dissimilar."

30. See the many pertinent examples and the literature quoted in Esman and Rabinovich, *Ethnicity, Pluralism and the State*. For a recent, and different, view on some of the same issues, see Ted Robert Gurr, "Peoples Against States: Ethnopolitical Conflict and the Changing World System," *International Studies Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (September 1994), pp. 347–377. Gurr predicts the continuation of massive ethnic conflict in the post–Cold War era in the poorer, weaker, and more heterogeneous states, primarily in Africa. See also Joseph V. Montville (ed.), *Conflict and Peacemaking in Multiethnic Societies* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1987).

31. Indeed, the self-definition of minorities, as that of other social groups engaging in political activity, is subject to dramatic changes with the circumstances, in the Middle East as elsewhere. See Augustus Richard Norton, "The Future of Civil Society in the Middle East," *Middle East Journal* 47, no. 2 (spring 1993), pp. 205–216.

32. Clifford Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution," in Geertz, *Old Societies and New States*. This article has been deservedly influential in all subsequent studies of ethnic politics and minorities, as surveyed in Gabriel Ben-Dor, "Ethnopolitics and the Middle Eastern State," in Esman and Rabinovich, *Ethnicity, Pluralism and the State*. See also Pierre L. van Den Berghe, *The Ethnic Phenomenon* (New York: Elsevier, 1981) and George M. Scott, Jr., "A Resynthesis of the Primordial and Circumstantial Approaches to Ethnic Group Solidarity: Toward an Explanatory Model," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 13, no. 2 (April 1990), pp. 147–171.

33. There are many alternative conceptions, some of which have been also very influential, for instance Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1968).

34. Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, much publicity has accompanied the pronouncements of Senator Daniel Moynihan, who argues that toward the end of the twentieth century ethnic conflict will be the "defining mode" of conflict in world politics. Some of this is also echoed in Huntington, who speaks of cultural conflict in more or less the same vein. See Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (summer 1993), pp. 22–49; and Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996). See also Benjamin Barber, *Jihad Versus McWorld* (New York: Random House, 1995) and Thomas Sowell, *Race and Culture: A World View* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

35. Indeed, the events in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in many parts of Africa, seem to back up much of what is contained in the theses of Moynihan and Huntington, in both relatively developed and less developed parts of the world.

36. Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution."

37. Gabriel Ben-Dor, "Ethnopolitics and the Middle Eastern State."

38. This is argued in great detail by Norton, who says that such "identities are malleable." Conference on Democratization in the Middle East, McGill University, Montreal, May 1993.

39. Such insecurity is one of the main facts of life in modernizing societies. See Ben-Dor, *The Druzes in Israel*. In turn, insecurity of this kind breeds anxiety and also tends to breed violence, which explains some of the connections between the processes of modernization and ethnic violence.

40. This point is of crucial theoretical importance. See Ben-Dor, "Ethnopolitics and the Middle Eastern State" and Ben-Dor, *State and Conflict*.

41. On ethnic groups and ethnic problems in contemporary Arab states, see Saad Eddin Ibrahim, *Management of Ethnic Issues in the Arab World* (Cairo: Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, 1995). This booklet presents useful data, ideas, and insights into the nature of problems of ethnicity in the various Arab countries. In general, Ibrahim argues that the correct way to handle these problems is for Arab states to make more progress toward democracy, federalism, and civil society. His bibliography contains useful references to contemporary Arab publications in the field.

42. "Compact minorities" is a term coined by Pierre Rondot and made current by Albert Hourani, as quoted in Itamar Rabinovich, "The Compact Minorities and the Syrian State, 1918-45," *Journal of Contemporary History* 14, no. 4 (October 1979), pp. 693–712.

43. Ibid; Ben-Dor, *The Druzes in Israel*.

44. Albert Hourani, *Minorities in the Arab World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947) is the classic exposition in this field. See also Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon: A Political Essay* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946).

45. For a comparative perspective on such developments, see Bendix, *Nation-Building and Citizenship*.

46. See Rabinovich, "The Compact Minorities."

47. A huge literature exists on military intervention in Middle East politics, and some of it does emphasize the centrality of the minorities in this process. See, for instance, Manfred Halpern, *The Politics of Social Change in the Middle East and North Africa* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963); Amos Perlmutter, "The Arab Military Elite," *World Politics* 22, no. 2 (January 1970), pp. 269–300; Eliezer Beeri, *Army Officers in Arab Politics and Society* (New York: Praeger, 1969); and Gabriel Ben-Dor, "The Politics of Threat: Military Intervention in the Middle East," *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 1 (spring 1974), pp. 57–69.

48. This process also raises the interesting theoretical and practical question of what happens to the controlling minority when the attempt is made to reduce the level of military intervention and to free up the political process for greater civilian involvement. See Gabriel Ben-Dor, "Civilianization of Military Regimes in the Arab World," *Armed Forces and Society* 1, no. 3 (May 1975), pp. 317–327.

49. This argument is made in detail in Gabriel Ben-Dor, "Stateness and Ideology," where the literature on Lebanon is surveyed and analyzed.

50. See Hourani, *Minorities in the Arab World*, and *Syria and Lebanon*. I find that quoting such classics, when—as in this case—they are *not* out of date, is one of the most pleasant duties of a scholar specializing in fields where classics do in fact exist.

51. Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East: 2000 Years of History, from the Rise of Christianity to the Present Day* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1995).

52. For a detailed survey of the history of the Druze, see Ben-Dor, *The Druzes in Israel* and Ben-Dor, "Intellectuals in the Politics of a Middle Eastern Minority," *Middle Eastern Studies* 12, no. 2 (May 1976), pp. 133–158.

53. See Gabriel Ben-Dor, "The Military in the Politics of Integration and Innovation: The Case of the Druze Minority in Israel," *Asian and African Studies* 9, no. 3 (1973), pp. 339–369.

54. This ties in strongly and naturally with the notion of *taqiyya*, the permission to pretend to be what one is not in order to survive. The notion may derive from Shi'i Islamic sources, but it appears to have to do more with the realities of minorities in the region than with theological considerations as such.

55. See Rabinovich, "The Compact Minorities."

56. See Abbas Kelidar, "Religion and the State in Syria," *Asian Affairs* 61 (1974), pp. 16–22.

57. A term coined by Itamar Rabinovich in his book *Syria Under the Ba'th, 1963–1966: The Army-Party Symbiosis in Syria* (New York: Praeger, 1971).

58. Interestingly, the literature on the Kurds is not quite as rich as one would expect, at least in proportion to their numbers and importance, although recently there has been something of a belated revival, due probably to the events of the Gulf War and its aftermath. See, for instance, David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996) and Abbas Vali, *Kurdish Nationalism: Identity, Sovereignty and the Dialectics of Violence in Kurdistan* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996). This may have to do with the relative inability of the Kurds to capture even a share of power, or—at least until until the 1991 Gulf War—to institutionalize a minority role in quest of self-government, with international salience. This contrasts sharply with the 'Alawis in Syria, or for that matter, with the Palestinians in the areas under Israeli control. See also the sources quoted in Servet Mutlu, "Ethnic Kurds in Turkey: A Demographic Study," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28, no. 4 (November 1996), pp. 517–541.

59. It is not one of the main purposes of this volume to compare how regimes try to develop strategies for dealing with minority problems. (On this see, for instance, Fred W. Riggs, "Ethnonationalism, Industrialism and the Modern State," *Third World Quarterly* 15, no. 4 [December 1994], pp. 583–611.) However, if this were a major objective, the treatment of the Kurds in the various countries clearly constitutes the most natural target of inquiry, when governments not only seem to differ substantially but also to treat the Kurdish question inside and outside their borders very differently.

60. This is a crucial difference between various minorities, particularly in a region of the world where state building has only recently reached a critical threshold, and where nation and state do not easily coexist. See Ben-Dor, *State and Conflict in the Middle East* and "Stateness and Ideology"; Elie Kedourie, *Democracy and Arab Political Culture* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Near East Policy, 1992); Halpern, *Politics of Social Change*.

61. In other words, the patterns of social and political mobilization of the Kurds differed vastly from those of other compact minorities. See the classic formulation in Karl W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953).

62. Free and orderly elections, contrary to some earlier romantic views, make a huge difference in modern political life, and even more for the minorities than for the majority in society. A more democratic Middle East, therefore, might be a more hospitable area for minorities. See Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany, and Paul Noble (eds.),

"Theoretical Perspectives," in *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World*, vol. 1 (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1995).

63. And this may make even more difference in the specific context of Middle East politics than elsewhere. See Elie Kedourie, *Politics in the Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

64. *Commentary* (January 1975), pp. 32–48, elaborated upon in his *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

65. See also Fouad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament: Arab Political Thought and Practice Since 1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). In this book Ajami pursues his famous and controversial argument as to the failure of Arab nationalism to resolve the major dilemmas it has faced.

66. The case of the Copts is also interesting in that Egypt is the most statelike Arab country (as argued in Ben-Dor, "Stateness and Ideology"), with clearly defined boundaries, a strong sense of identity within them, a tradition of allegiance to central rule, and at the same time, a single majority and a single minority. At the very least, the parameters of the problem are delineated more sharply than in practically any other case.

67. These are examples of what is referred to at times as "synthetic neo-particularism," as surveyed in Ben-Dor, *The Druzes in Israel*.

68. See, for instance, Joseph LaPalombara, *Politics Within Nations* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1974).

69. This notion is identified, above all, with the work of Huntington in his *Political Order in Changing Societies*. However, for the complexities involved, see Gabriel Ben-Dor, "Institutionalization and Political Development: A Conceptual and Theoretical Analysis," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 17, no. 3 (July 1975), pp. 309–325.

70. See, for instance, Perlmutter, "The Arab Military Elite."

71. The ultimate institution to be captured in such cases may be no less than the state itself, as argued in Ben-Dor, "Ethnopolitics and the Middle Eastern State."

72. See James A. Bill and Robert Springborg, *Politics in the Middle East,* 4th ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1994).

73. Interestingly enough, the vast literature on Islam in recent years deals with questions of ethnicity and minorities much less than with general ideological and political considerations.

74. See P. J. Vatikiotis, *Islam and the State* (London: Croom and Helm, 1987).

75. See Samir Khalaf, *Lebanon's Predicament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

76. On the ideas of the Islamic state, see Nazih Ayoubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 1–35. The bibliography of this book contains most of the relevant sources up to the beginning of the present decade.

77. In a way, all this only demonstrates the huge difference between the idea of the Jewish state, in which religiousness may well be less important than nationalism, and the idea of the Islamic state. In the latter case, the religious component is much weightier, and the nationalist component is often found in another sphere altogether, as in Arabness and the like. See the detailed argument in Ben-Dor, *State and Conflict*.

78. Many analysts consider Lebanon indeed a nonstate. See Ben-Dor, "Stateness and Ideology."

79. This dilemma, at least until the Iranian revolution of 1979, was best demonstrated by the problematical situation in Pakistan, the only state founded explicitly as Islamic.

80. This picture may, however, be an idealized and nostalgic version of reality. See William R. Polk and Richard Chambers (eds.), *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

81. This is argued emphatically in Kedourie, *Politics in the Middle East*, chapter 6 (pp. 268–246), and throughout Vatikiotis, *Islam and the State*.

82. Indeed, some pundits, such as Bernard Lewis, are already inclined to argue that the wave is past its peak, due to disillusionment with the Iranian revolution, an inability of the Islamists to articulate a credible and coherent political doctrine, the strength of the incumbents, and many other factors.

83. Indeed, the history since the late 1970s gives further credence to the argument (Ben-Dor, *State and Conflict*) that it is the state, and not Islam, Arabism, socialism, or ethnicity that will continue to dominate Middle East politics in the foreseeable future.

84. In the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s, the term *occupied land* was used by Iraq not to refer to Palestine but to Khuzistan, a province of Iran.

85. See Martin Kramer, *Shi'ism, Resistance, and Revolution* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1987).

86. The lack of basic definitions and good typologies demonstrates not only the considerable theoretical confusion in the field but also the need to do much "pretheoretical" work, as Harry Eckstein put it in his writings, namely working out the basic concepts and dividing them into workable categories. See Eckstein, "On the Etiology of Internal Wars," in Bruce Mazlish, Arthur D. Kaledin, and David B. Ralston (eds.), *Revolution* (New York: Free Press, 1971), pp. 31–34.

87. In other words, as Israeli anthropologist Emanuel Marx put it in June 1985, ethnicity is also "situational." His remark was made at a conference on ethnicity and politics at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

88. See James Piscatori (ed.), *Islamic Fundamentalism and the Gulf Crisis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

89. The case of Sudan is analyzed in great detail in Chapter 4. However, I am trying to show here the utility of the case method in developing and testing theoretical considerations. After all, the idea of producing a volume of different cases all over the Middle East is not just to show the rich variety in the region but also to try and study the similar and the dissimilar among them. On the utility of the case method for theory building and other purposes there is a large literature associated with the names of Harry Eckstein, Arend Lijphardt, and Alexander L. George. See, for instance, Alexander L. George, "Case Studies and Theory Development: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison" in Paul Gordon Lauren (ed.), *Diplomacy: New Approaches in History, Theory and Policy* (New York: The Free Press, 1979), pp. 43–68. Extreme, or limiting, case studies like that of Sudan help us with generating hypotheses and ideas, as well as testing other, existing ideas and insights in different situations.

90. See Amin Hassanpour, *Nationalism and Language in Kurdistan, 1918–1985* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992).

91. Because it is such an extreme case, its features constitute a useful check against hasty generalizations, while at the same time allowing us to test in a preliminary way some of the more obvious conclusions arising from comparing other cases. See Alexander L. George and Timothy J. Mckeown, "Case Studies and Theories of

Organizational Decision Making," *Advances in Information Processing in Organizations*, vol. 2 (1985), pp. 21–58.

92. Gabriel Ben-Dor, "Federalism in the Arab World," in Daniel Elazar (ed.), *Federalism and Political Integration* (Ramat Gan, Israel: Turtledove, 1979).

93. Compare the fascinating picture of segmentation in John Waterbury, *The Commander of the Faithful: The Moroccan Political Elite, A Study in Segmented Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), an extreme case of fragmented political processes and institutions.

94. A fascinating study of one such example is to be found in Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq*.

95. For a picture of the deployment of the minorities in the region, see Robert D. Mclaurin (ed.), *The Political Role of Minority Groups in the Middle East* (New York: Praeger, 1979).

96. The case of Jordan, analyzed in Chapter 5 of this volume, does not appear to fall clearly into any of these neat categories, but analysis reveals that it has a single ruling group that is the minority (the East Bankers), and the majority group outside the political establishment (the Palestinians) is often referred to as the minority. For a comparative picture with other regions in the world, see Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner (eds.), *Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict and Democracy* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

97. Some theories of military intervention tend to attribute the high incidence of military coups in Iraq and Syria to a large extent to this ethnic factor. See Perlmutter, "The Arab Military Elite."

98. Smith, "Imagined Identities," p. 619.