DOCUMENTI

IAI

ETHNIC CONFLICT AND STATE-BUILDING IN THE ARAB WORLD

by Saad Eddin Ibrahim

ISTITUTO AFFARI INTERNAZIONALI

Saad Eddin Ibrahim

Ethnic Conflict and State-Building
in the Arab World

I. An Overview

All the world's armed conflicts since 1988, with the possible exception of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, have been over internal ethnic issues. In fact since 1945, ethnic conflicts have claimed some 15 million lives, several times those resulting from inter-state wars. At present, ethnic conflicts span three old continents. Typical examples are those in Burma and Sri Lanka in Asia; Somalia, Sudan and Ruwanda in Africa, the former USSR and Yugoslavia in Europe. [1]

With only 8% of world population, the Arab-Middle East has had some 25% of all the world's armed conflicts since 1945. Most of these conflicts have been ethnically-based. **Summary Table (1)** shows the balance of inter-state and inter-ethnic armed conflicts in the region in terms of human and material cost. Though considered by all concerned as the principal one, the Arab-Israeli conflict (some six wars and a continued Palestinian and Lebanese struggle against Israeli occupation) has claimed some 200,000 lives in forty years. In contrast, during the same period, ethnic

conflicts have claimed several times as many lives. The Lebanese civil war (1975-1990) alone matched the same number of casualties as all the Arab-Israeli wars. The Sudanese civil war (on and off since 1956) has claimed at least five times as many lives as all Arab-Israeli wars. The same relative costs apply in terms of population displacement, material devastation, and financial expenditure. [2]

In the 1990s, we expect that the armed conflicts in the region will be more of the intra-state than of the inter-state variety. Militant Islamic activism is to be added to the on-going sources of armed civil strife in a score of Arab-Middle Eastern countries. Algeria and Egypt are currently two prominent cases in point. Thus, the greatest threat to security of the states in the region are likely to be internal. [3] The manipulation or spell-over effects of each internal armed conflicts could, of course, lead to inter-state conflicts as well. This paper, however, deals with only one type, the ethnically based, internal conflicts.

The disproportionality of ethnic conflicts vis-a-vis inter-state conflicts is more surprising in view of the global socio-cultural demographics of the Arab world. With the broadest definition of "ethnicity," as referring to contiguous or co-existing groups differing in race, religion, sect, language, culture or national origin, [4] the Arab world is one of the more ethnically homogeneous area in the world today.

Summary Table (1)
The Cost of Armed Conflicts in the Middle
East and North Africa (MENA) Region: 1948 - 1993

Type of Conflict	Period	No. of Casualties	Estimated Cost in Billions of $ US (1991 value)	Estimated Population Displacement
A) Inter-State Conflict				
Arab-Israeli conflict	1948-1990	200,000	300.0	3,000,000
Iraq-Iran	1980-1988	600,000	300.0	1,000,000
Gulf War	1990-1991	120,000	650.0	1,000,000
Other Inter-State conflicts	1945-1991	20,000	50.0	1,000,000
Sub-Total		**940,000**	**1,300.0**	**6,000,000**
B) Intra-State Conflicts				
Sudan	1956-1991	900,000	30.0	4,500,000
Iraq	1960-1991	400,000	30.0	1,200,000
Lebanon	1958-1990	180,000	50.0	1,000,000
Yemen	1962-1972	100,000	5.0	500,000
Syria	1975-1985	30,000	0.5	150,000
Morocco (Sahara)	1976-1991	20,000	3.0	100,000
S. Yemen	1986-1987	10,000	0.2	50,000
Somalia	1989-1991	20,000	0.3	200,000
Other Intra-State conflict	1945-1991	30,000	1.0	300,000
Sub-Total		**1,690,000**	**110.0**	**8,000,000**
Grand Total (All Armed Conflicts)		**2,630,000**	**1,500.0**	**14,000,000**

Source: Files of the Arab Data Unit (ADU), Ibn Khaldoun Center for Developmental Studies.

In 1993, the Arab world had a population of slightly over 236 million. The overwhelming majority (80.0% i.e. 190 millions) share the same ethnic characteristics. Racially, they are a semitic-hamitic-caucasian mix. Religiously, they are Muslims of the Sunni denomination. Culturally and linguistically, they are Arabic speaking natives **(See Appendix for detailed Tables)**. In terms of national origin, they have been rooted for many centuries in the same "Arab Homeland" (extending from Morocco on the

Atlantic ocean to Bahrain in the Arab Persian Gulf). This overwhelming majority (of 80%) gets even bigger as we add groups which differ in only one ethnic variable that is perceived by the respective group itself as being a marginal element in the definition of its identity. For example, most Shia'a Muslims and most Christians living in the Arab world consider their "Arabism" as the primary axis of their identity, superseding their "Shi'aism" or "Christianity". For them, the "linguistic-cultural" variable is the more salient ethnic-divide. On this basis the Arab "majority" jumps to over 86.0% of the population in the Arab world. **Summary Table (2)** shows the major ethnic groupings in the Arab world along four dimensions: cultural-linguistic, religious, denominational, and racial.

Summary Table (2)
Major Ethnic Divides of the Arab World in the Early 1990s

Ethnic Divide	Population Size (in millions)	% in Population	Countries of concentration
1. The Majority (Arabic speaking, Muslim. Sunnies, Caucasians)	190.0	80.0	In all Arab countries except Lebanon. Iraq and Bahrain
2. Lingo-cultural minorities (non-Arab)	32.3	13.7	Morocco, Sudan. Algeria. Iraq
3 Religious minorities (non-Muslims)	17.9	7.6	Sudan, Egypt, Lebanon. occupied Palestine
4. Islamic Minorities (non-Sunnies)	20.8	8.8	Iraq. Lebanon. Syria, the Gulf
5. Racial Minorities (non-Semitic/Hamitic/ Caucasians)	8.7*	3.7	Sudan

Also included in Divides 2 and 3. above.
Source: Saad Eddin Ibrahim. 1994. Sects, Ethnicity, and Minority Groups in the Arab World. (In Arabic). Cairo. Ibn Khaldoun Center, p. 86.

4

Despite the apparent ethnic homogeneity on the pan-Arab level, we observe marked ethnic heterogeneities in several countries - e.g. Sudan, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, Bahrain, and Yemen. In these nine countries, as many as 35% of the population differ from the Arab Muslim Sunni Caucasian majority in one or more of the four ethnic variables (of language, religion, sect, or race). It is noted that nearly all nine countries are located at the outer rim of the Arab world, often intersecting a cultural borderland. In all nine countries, there has been some overt form of ethnic tension. In four of them - Sudan, Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen - such tensions have flared up in recent decades into an armed protracted conflict. The unity and territorial integrity of each has been seriously threatened. [5]

Despite the preponderance of ethnic conflicts in the Arab world, Arab social scientists and political activists alike have not given the phenomenon its due share of attention. Marxists, nationalists, and Islamists have tended to ignore the ethnic question or write it off as a residual of some other problems. The "foreign factor" (e.g. imperialists and Zionists) has been offered as a common explanation underlying most ethnic conflicts in the Arab world. [6] While such a factor is not to be dismissed, a new generation of Arab social scientists is now going far beyond such conspiratorial explanations of ethnic conflicts. [7] The remainder of this paper offers an account of these new endeavors, discussed under the following four problematique-headings as they bear on the ethnic question in the Arab world:

- Competing loci of identity
- Dilemmas of modern state-building

- Socio-economic cleavages
- Vulnerabilities to external factors

The four problematiques are generally inter-connected in all Arab countries; but their interplay is particularly acute in those countries with greater ethnic heterogeneity. The disintegration of traditional Islamic politics in the 19th century, the final collapse of the Ottoman Empire (1922), and the concomitant or subsequent Western colonial designs led to the fragmentation of the Arab world and the embryonic beginnings of modern "territorial states" in the inter-war period (1918-1939). [s] As these states gained political independence in the 1940s-1960s period, they inherited equally fragmented ethnic minorities. The political space was replete with challenges that had to do with forging a national identity, state-building, consolidating independence, achieving socio-economic development, and insuring a reasonable measures of equity. Moreover, these challenges were to be met in an international system polarized by the ideological and geopolitical conflict of the Cold War.

II. The Identity Problematique

Briefly stated the main competing ideological paradigms in the Arab world, since the turn of the century, tend to be exclusionary of certain ethnic groups from full-fledged membership of the political community. At present, the Arab intellectual-political space is dominated by Islamic and secular nationalist ideologies. Each has its own locus of political identity.

A. The Islamists Vision and Ethnicity

The Islamists, naturally, base the political bond of culture, society, and state on religion. This would automatically exclude non-Muslims from the respective polities of the Arab world - i.e. some 18.0 millions, mostly Christians together with a few hundred thousand Jews **(See Appendix Table 3)**. In its extreme purist form, the exclusion would entail some 21.0 million non-Sunni Muslims as well (i.e. various Shia'as and Kharagite sects). Main-stream Islamists would make that exclusion partial - i.e. confined to banning non-Muslims from assuming top commanding offices (e.g. heads of state, governors, and the judiciary). [9] Their rationale is that holders of such offices perform not only temporal roles but also carry out religious duties - i.e. leading the prayers, implementing the *Shari'a* (Islamic law), and commanding the faithful in the *Jihad* (holy religious war). The purist Islamists would make the exclusion of non-Muslims complete from any state or governmental role at any level. To them, non-Muslims are to exist as "protected communities", (*ahl zimma*), run their own communal affairs, and pay the "*jezia*" (a poll tax).[10] So long as they respect the Muslim majority and recognize the sovereignty of the Islamic state, non-Muslim communities are to be treated with respect, compassion and religious tolerance.

In this vision, all Muslims are considered equal regardless of their race, culture, or national origin. Accordingly, Kurds (in Iraq and Syria), Berbers (in Algeria and Morocco) and Blacks (in Mauritania and Sudan) are not considered "minorities". Together these Muslim (but non-Arab) groups number over 2.0 millions. This Islamist vision of the "political order" would

naturally be welcomed by non-Arab but Muslim members of the community, in which "citizenship" is based on religion. Obviously, in such a polity non-Muslims in the Arab world feel quite threatened, as well as alienated.

B. Arab Nationalist Vision

The Arab nationalist vision, started to unfold in the last decades of the Ottoman Empire. It emerged as a reaction to both Ottoman despotism and the Young Turks' Tauranic chauvinism. In its pure form, the Arab nationalist vision is predicated on culture and language as the pillars of political identity of state, society and citizenship. In this sense, Arab nationalism has been a secular ideology. Accordingly, all native speakers of Arabic, bearers of Arab culture, and who perceive themselves as "Arabs" would be full-fledged members of the Arab nation, enjoying full rights of citizenship - regardless of race, religion or sect. The Arab nationalist vision would not recognize other non-Arab national or cultural groups living in the "Arab Homeland" as autonomous communities or independent entities in their own right. However, their individual members would be treated as equal Arab citizens under the law. [11]

Thus, while the Islamists would exclude "non-Muslims", the Arab nationalists would exclude "non-Arabs" from full-fledged membership in the polity. At present (1994), the size of the latter is some 2.0 million. On the other hand, non-Muslim Arabs are to be fully integrated in the national political community. At present (1994), these amount to some 18.0 millions (mostly Christians).

Naturally non-Arabs would feel threatened by the Arab nationalist vision. This is particularly the case with sizeable non-Arab communities which have national aspirations of their own (e.g. the Kurds) or who are keen on preserving their cultural integrity and language (e.g. the Berbers). Also, some non-Muslim communities fear that despite its secular appearance, Arab nationalism has its Islamic underpinnings. This apprehension is to be found explicitly among the Maronite Christians of Lebanon, and implicitly among the Christian Copts of Egypt. [12]

Thus each of the competing paradigms of identity in the Arab world would exclude what the other would include in their respective definition of the political community. We will see how modern state-builders, in practice, have tried to cope with this dilemma; by the subtle evolving of country nationalism referred to as "Wataniyya." [13]

C. The Interactable Question of Identity

As it will turn out in the Arab world, as elsewhere, the question of identity as one of the most vexing socio-political cleavages. It taps cultural, symbolic and existential notions of individual and collective self. Unlike other cleavages (e.g. class, occupational, educational, ideological political), ethnic identity and the conflicts it generates are "intrinsically less amenable to compromise than those revolving around material issues". [14]

Both the Islamic and nationalist visions have failed to take into account sub-identities within their own broad primordial frame of reference. Thus, Islamic visionaries have tended to down play sectarian

9

cleavages within and between fellow Muslims. In the Lebanese civil war (1975-1989), more Shia'a and Sunni Muslims killed each other than they killed Christians. Indeed, more Shia'a Muslims killed each other than they killed Sunni and Druz Muslims; and than Christians of all sects. By the same token, more Christians were killed by other Christians than of or by Muslims in the Lebanese civil war. [15]

Nor would proponents of the Islamic vision of a political identity take much comfort from the infighting among Afghani Muslim Mujahideen which claimed more Muslim casualties in three years (1990-1993) than the entire 10 years war of resistance against the Soviet and Soviet-backed regime (1980-1990).[16] Equally, proponents of the pan-Arab nationalist vision have been seriously discredited by actions of regimes spousing that vision. The quarter of a century rivalry between the two Baathist regimes in Iraq and Syria is a dramatic case in point. It just happens that the elite of each regime belongs to a different religious Muslim minority sect in their respective countries. [17]

Much of the tension in North Yemen (1970-1990) and then in unified Yemen (1990-1994), which escalated into a full fledged civil war in mid 1994 has not been without its Muslim Sectarian undertones. Despite official denials by all parties in the conflict, the hidden but persistent cleavage has been between the Shia'a Muslim *Zaydies* of the North and the Sunni Muslim *Shawafi* of the South. [18]

Thus elegant and neat as the two competing visions of identities in the Arab world may be, they have failed in practice to project a coherent or

consistent political program. They have failed to deal with sub-identities, let alone their interplay with other socio-economic variables.

III. The Task of State-Building

The modern state-building process in the Arab world is some seven decades old. The earliest one in Egypt (1922) tackled the issue of identity with a compromise. While Egypt's first constitution (1923) was clearly secular, basing full citizenship on birthrights, regardless of religion, race, or creed, yet one article stipulated that "Islam is the state religion". But this was understood, in Egypt and elsewhere in Arab countries with similar constitutions and stipulations, to mean only two things which did not seriously impede the integration of non-Muslims in the polity. The first was that the head of state would be a Muslim;* the second was that Islamic Shari'a would be a source (but not the only one) of legislation. [19]

In practice, nearly every Arab state today has avoided the clear dichotomies of choice - such as between religious vs. secular, or national vs. country (*Qawmiyya* vs. *Wataniyya*) - in forging their politic-cultural identities. Instead each Arab state (or regime) has attempted its own reconciliation, with greater emphasis on one particular dimension but never to the total exclusion of the other. Hence, it is possible to plot the Arab states on the two continua of "religious-secular" and "country (*watan*) - Arab nation (*Umma Arabiyya*)", as the following diagram shows:

---

* Lebanon is the only exception among Arab states, where a constitutional tradition provides that the head of state be a Christian Maronite.

11

Religious (Islamic)   Secular

```
 _____
|                                                                                |
```

Saudi Arabia   Gulf states   Sudan   Morocco   Jordan   Libya   Egypt   Algeria   Yemen   Tunisia   Palestine   Iraq   Syria   Lebanon

Morocco   Tunisia   Algeria   Sudan   Lebanon   Saudi Arabia   Gulf States   Egypt   Palestine   Jordan   Libya   Iraq   Syria   Yemen

```
 _____
|                                                                                |
```

Country Patriotism   Arab   Nationalism
(Wataniyya)   (Qawmiyya)

The above pragmatic handling of reconciling secular and religious considerations was not the only issue in forging the identity of the new states. Early state-builders also had to contend with reconciling pan-Arab national considerations with those of sub-national identities (*Qawmmi* vs. *Qautry*). The leaders of the pan-Arab movement who had rallied around Sherif Hussein of Mecca in the Great Arab Revolt (1916) were frustrated as Britain and France reneged on their promises of Arab independence and unification (as was later revealed by the Sykes-Picco secret agreement). Yet Arab nationalist hopes remained alive. With the successive independence of one country after another in mid century, early state-builders made another pragmatic reconciliation. In their constitutions or declarations of independence, it was often stipulated that while their country is declared as an "independent sovereign state" it nonetheless remains an integral part of the "Arab Nation" or the "Arab Homeland", waiting for the opportune moment to "reunite with the other Arab parts".[20]

The establishment of the League of Arab States in 1945 was a formalization of this compromise. It ensured the separate independence of its member states but kept the future door open for gradual measures of cooperation, integration, and unification.

Thus while Arab ideologists debated their competing visions some of which were mutually exclusive, practical statesmen and politicians engaged in the "art of the possible". The above two compromises were cases in point; and operated reasonably well during the early decades of independence in several Arab countries which adopted a "liberal" or quasi-liberal systems of governance - e.g. Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Morocco. Where sizable ethnic groups existed they were accommodated politically under such "liberal" systems. In some cases (e.g. Lebanon and Jordan), ethnic groups were formally or explicitly recognized and allotted a proportional share in elected and ministerial councils. In others (e.g. Egypt, Syria, Iraq), similar, though implicit accommodations were practiced. In other words, socio-ethnic diversity was matched by a political pluralism of one sort or another.

The end of the first liberal experiment in those Arab states during the 1950s and 1960s entailed potential problems for their ethnic communities. The military regimes which took over power in many of them adopted militant Arab nationalist ideologies and bold socio-economic reforms. On both counts, they were bound to alienate this or that ethnic group in their respective countries. In Egypt, for example, Nasser's July 1952 Revolution alarmed non-Muslim communities on several grounds. None of the one hundred Free Officers who staged the Revolution was a Christian, when

Copts alone (apart from other Christian denominations) represented some 8.0% of the population. Nor were Egypt's Copts particularly enthusiastic about the new regime's Arab nationalist orientation. Worse still was the regime's socialist policies which in the aggregate hit the Christians harder, as they were disproportionately represented in the landed-bourgeoisie classes of Egypt. Something similar occurred elsewhere in the Arab world where military or single-party regimes ruled for several years. In countries with marked ethnic heterogeneity, this lack of political pluralism was bound to create tension. Even when military-single-party regimes attempted to accommodate ethnic groups, such accommodation was often either nominal, or arbitrary depending on the whims of the rulers; thus leading to further alienation of these groups. [21]

In two extreme cases, ethnic majority rule was replaced by the rule of an ethnic minority. Thus, under the ideological guise of the **Arab Baath Socialist Party**, an Alawite military rule has tightened its grip on the Arab Muslim Sunni majority (65%) in Syria since 1970. In Iraq it is members of an Arab Muslim Sunni minority (35%) which, since 1968, had the upper hand over all other ethnic groups, some of which are numerically larger, e.g. the Shia'a Muslims who account for about 45% of Iraq's total population.

In the Sudan members of the ruling military elite have invariably come from one Arab Muslim northern province around the capital Khartoum. Under populist, socialist, and now Islamic guise the three military coups d'etat (of 1958, 1969, and 1989) have been staged by Arab Muslim northern officers. In none of them was there a single southern non-Muslim officer at the start. Later on, a few token Southerners were added.

With the exception of Egypt, the alienation of ethnic groups vis-a-vis the ruling military-ideological single-party regimes has grown into overt unrest. In Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Algeria, Somalia, and Mauritania it has erupted into violent confrontations of varying degrees during the last three decades. At present, there is protracted armed conflict in the Sudan, Somalia and Iraq. At times it is not only the legitimacy of the ruling regime which is challenged by this or that ethnic group, but also the legitimacy of the state itself. Thus, the territorial integrity of the Sudan, Somalia and Iraq are now in serious question. Several decades of a state-building process is giving way to a reverse process of state-deconstruction.

IV. The Social Question: Mobilization and Equity

The twin process of Western penetration and the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire led, among other things, to the breakdown of the traditional organization of ethnic groups in the Arab world. Their residential and occupational patterns have become less segregated. With independence, the social mobilization and integration into the societal main-stream was greatly expedited; and their political consciousness markedly hightened. Modern education, urbanization, expanding means of communication and exposure to the mass media, and have all been instrumental in this respect. [22]

As elsewhere in developing regions, this social mobilization was ¬panied or followed by a steady rise in expectations on the part of ¬roups in the Arab world. Those expectations included quests for

15

greater shares in power, wealth, and prestige in their newly independent countries. The brief liberal experiment in several Arab states satisfied the quest of ethnic groups for political participation, but not as much their quest for social justice - i.e. an equitable share in wealth. The early years of military-ideological regimes satisfied ethnic groups or promised to do so, as far as social equity is concerned, through such redistributional measures as land reform, nationalization of foreign and upper class assets, an open and free system of education, the provision of equal opportunities and the adoption of meritocracy systems of employment. However, as these regimes got consolidated and their tenure in power lasted, even the reality and/or promise of greater equity began to erode for all non-ruling groups, including ethnic minorities.

Thus, with political participation long curtailed, and social mobilization continuing unabated, while progress in social equity coming to a halt or worsening, structural-relative deprivation has been steadily rising since the 1970s. Such deprivations have been felt more by ethnic groups than by other sectors in society. Consequently, they were the first and the loudest in expressing their resentment against what by now has become an authoritarian-bureaucratic ruling class, with ideological trappings fading into the background.

Instead of responding to such protestations by resuming the march of social equity or reopening the political system for more participation, most Arab authoritarian-bureaucratic regimes responded by greater coercion domestically and/or military adventures externally. Thus the Syrian regime got embroiled in the Lebanese civil war (since 1975); the Iraqi regime in two

Gulf wars (with Iran 1980-88, and in Kuwait with an international coalition in 1990-91); the Libyan regime in Chad (1975-1988); the Algerian regime in a proxy war with Morocco in the Sahara (1976-1990); the Somali regime in the Ogden with Ethiopia (1977); and the Mauritanian regime in series of armed skirmishes with Senegal (1990-1991).

Both mounting coercion internally and military adventures externally have had the effect of earmarking a greater share of state budgets to arms purchase and the dwindling share of social programmes. Thus social equity continued to worsen even further for all non-ruling groups, but more so for ethnic minorities. Thus the ethnic divide in several Arab countries has been intensified by a class divide. [23] The combination of class-ethnic deprivation needed one more factor to erupt into an open armed conflict - a foreign ally. This takes us to the external question.

V. External Penetration and Ethnicity in the Arab World

Because of its unique strategic location as well as resources, especially oil, the Arab-Middle East has been a target of domination by rival foreign powers in the last two centuries. Meanwhile, several structural weaknesses in the Arab-Middle East were accentuated by such powers to enhance their hegemonic designs. The ethnic question has been one of those weaknesses.

As early as the late 18th century rival Western powers scrambled for a client-sponsorship of various ethnic groups, that lived in the provinces of the declining Ottoman Empire, the Sick Man of Europe. This was to be a

pretext for possible inheritance of such provinces upon the final demise of the Sick Man. A case in point was France's sponsorship of the Christian Maronites, Britain's of the Druz Muslims, and Russia's of the Christian Orthodox - all in one Arab-Ottoman province, Greater Syria (including Mount Lebanon). On the whole, ethnic groups in the Arab world remained long reluctant and skeptical of such unsolicited guardianship of foreign powers. But as corruption and despotism of the ailing Ottoman Empire reached an all time high, some of these groups accepted to be under such guardianships for protection not only against the central authorities but also against real or perceived threats from other indigenous ethnic groups at home.

This Nineteenth Century pattern of big powers meddling into the Arab world's ethnic affairs would continue into the twentieth century, both under direct colonial rule of fragmented Arab polities, as well as after their formal independence. The big power actors varied during the two centuries but the pattern has remained essentially the same. After World War II, with more independent or new states in the Arab-Middle East, several regional actors have also gotten involved, often by proxy, in the ethnic affairs of one another. Notoriously among the latter were Israel (in Lebanon, Iraq, and the Sudan), Iran (in Iraq and Lebanon), Ethiopia (in the Sudan). [24] Likewise, at times some Arab states meddled in the ethnic question of neighboring Arab and non-Arab states (e.g. Syria in Lebanon and Iraq; Iraq in Lebanon, Syria, and Iran; Sudan in Ethiopia). [25]

The big power rivalry during the Cold War (1945-1990) added an extra complicating dimension of an ideological nature to the meddling in

the Arab world's ethnic question. At times factions of the same ethnic group were as much in conflict with each other as were their external patrons, regional or global. Rarely did the external factor alone trigger serious ethnic conflicts. Responsible for such conflicts, primarily, were indigenous factors of political, socio-economic, or cultural nature, of the kind discussed in sections II, III and IV above.

What the external factor did, if played out, was to intensify, complicate and protract such conflicts. This is especially the case with armed ethnic conflicts, which tend, over time, to create a political economy and a sub-political culture of their own-far beyond the original issues of the conflict. The civil wars in Lebanon, Sudan, and Iraq are dramatic cases in point. At present (1994), Iraq is *de facto* divided into three zones - two in the north (Kurds) and south (Shia'as) with no limited control by the central government in Baghdad. Only the middle zone (about half of Iraq) has been under the total control of the Iraqi government since its defeat in the Gulf war (1991). The other two zones are now off limits to Iraqi air power - by UN and Western Allies orders. So much is this case that the "Protected Zone" in the North has felt secure enough to elect in 1992 its own Kurdish Parliament and has its own government. [26]

VI. Ethnicity, Civil Society, and Democratization

To capitulate, the ethnic question is one of the most serious challenges facing the Arab world at large, and, in particular, those Arab states with a marked ethnic diversity. The nascent system of modern country-states as well as Arab intelligentsia have failed to comprehend or

deal with the ethnic problem frontally on its own merit. To begin with, the Caesarian birth of many of the Arab states at the hands of colonial midwives brought to existence a number of seriously deformed Arab states. Had the liberal experiment been allowed to continue; or was resumed, say a decade or two after its interruption, much of the early socio-economic deformities may have been corrected through a genuine process of participation.

A. Participatory Politics

Participatory political systems have proven to be the most effective modality of peaceful management of social cleavages in general, and ethnic conflict in particular. Primordial loyalties are often moderated, reduced, or even eliminated as modern socio-economic formations (e.g. classes and occupational groups) freely evolve. Based on interest, the latter offer members of ethnic groups a substitute or at least a partial alternative for collective protection and enhancement of legitimate rights and needs. They allow the kind of crisscrossing modern associational networks which have come to be lumped under the concept of "civil society". In this broad sense, civil society would include political parties, trade unions, professional associations and other non-governmental organizations on the community and national levels. This kind of associational networks have proven to be the sensitive nerves of participatory political system even when some of them are avowedly "apolitical".

Participatory politics may in some Arab countries contribute to initial political instability or lead itself to various forms of demagoguery. Rival

20

ethnic leaders may engage in "upsmanship politics". But in the medium and long runs, responsible democratic politics is bound to prevail. In countries with sizable ethnic groups concentrated in one province or a geographic area, "separatist tendencies" may also be expected, once the political system is opened to free expression and free balloting - as is vividly, and sometimes tragically, witnessed in the former USSR and Yugoslavia. While such a right must be conceded in principle, it could practically result in chaos.

B. Federalism

To avoid the negative spill outs of such an eventuality, "federalism" or even "confederalism" should be real options. The flexible and imaginative application of "federalism" could make a modern functional equivalent of the "Millet System" in earlier Muslim empires. Federalism would reconcile the legitimate impulse of Arab states to preserve their territorial integrity with the legitimate right of ethnic groups to preserve their culture, human dignity and political autonomy.

It goes without saying that legitimate human and political rights of minorities and ethnic groups would hardly be respected unless they are also respected for the majority. In fact, as the Lebanese social scientist Antoine Messarra once observed, "no political Arab regime has had a serious problem with an ethnic minority without also having a serious problem with the majority in the same country". The Kurds and the Southern Sudanese who have long risen up in arms against their central governments have recently come to the same conclusion: their problem would not be resolved without changing the entire political system to one

that is responsive and accountable to both the majority and ethnic minorities. This proposition has been summed up by the Kurdish national movement in the phrase, "democracy for all Iraqis and autonomy for the Kurds". The Sudanese Liberation Army (mostly Southerners) has adopted a similar slogan, democracy for all of the Sudan and federalism for the South".

Despite some serious armed protracted ethnic conflicts in the Arab World, there are other instances where such conflicts were well managed or altogether averted. Again, it was a combination of participatory politics and decentralization or federalism. Of special note here is the case of Berbers in Morocco and Algeria, who constitute roughly the same percentage in the total population - 25.0 - 35.0%. A cultural linguistic minority, the Berbers in both countries are like the Arab majority in terms of religion and denomination - i.e. Sunni Muslims. The Berbers have been an integral and important part of Maghreb history since the seventh century A.D. They took part in the Arab-Muslim conquest of the Iberian Peninsula, the Saharan and Sub-Saharan Africa. Equally, in modern times, they were subjected to French colonial rule, resisted its policy of "divide and rule", and struggled gallantly for their countries' independence in the 1950s (Morocco) and 1960s (Algeria). In the post independence decade, Berbers in both countries evolved their own cultural aspirations as a distinct group. The Moroccan king accommodated those aspirations; while the Algerian FLN ruling single party stunted them. In the 1990s, the Moroccan Berbers seem far more integrated in the national politics of their country than their Algerian counterparts. The latter have increasingly been agitating for cultural recognition. The threat of Islamic militancy, with its "over-

Arabization" tendencies, is quickly turning Algerian Berbers' cultural quest into an equally militant political protest. [27] At present (1994), the Algerian state is under severe double cross-pressure of both Islamic and Berber militants. [28] Thus, while Morocco is sailing toward steady democratization with its Arabs and Berbers alike, Algeria is disintegrating under the militancy of some Arab and Berber groups.

Sudan is another illustrative case. Out of 38 years of independence (1956-1994), the country had only ten years of relative calmness between the black Negroid South and the Arab-Muslim North (1972-1982). Those ten peaceful years were due to the Addis Ababa Agreement (AAAs) which provided for Southern Self Rule. When the Numairy military regime reneged on the AAAs in 1983 by restoring Khartoum's direct rule and imposed Islamic Shari'a on non-Muslims, the South flared up again in an armed insurrection. The situation has not improved despite the succession of three different regimes since then (1985, 1986, 1989). [29]

Thus, while Morocco and Algeria represent two comparative simultaneous test cases of governance and ethnic management, Sudan represents a one diachronic test case of such management. The conclusion is basically the same: nowadays, societies that are ethnically pluralistic, have to be also politically pluralistic.

APPENDIX

Table (A): Linguistic Minorities in the Arab World at the beginning of the 1990s

The Minority Group	The total number in the Arab world	Religion of the majority	Race	The native country according to importance	Regions of present centralization to their
Kurds	5.000.000	Muslims	Hamitic/	same present place	Iraq-Syria
Armenians	1.000.000	Christians	Semitic		
Aramites	125.000	Christians	Hamitic/ Semitic	Armenia (Turkey & Soviet Union	Lebanon-Syria- Iraq-Egypt
Turkmans	125.000	Muslims	Hamitic/ Semitic	same present place	Syria-Iraq Lebanon
Turks	125.000	Muslims	Hamitic/ Semitic	Turkey	Syria-Iraq
Iranians	350.000	Muslims	Hamitic/ Semitic	Iran	Iraq- the Gulf countries
Western Jews	3.500.000	Jewish	Hamitic/ Semitic	Europe-the two Americas	Occupied Palestine
Negro tribes	5.500.000	Pagan	Hamitic/ Semitic	same present place	(Israel) S. Egypt
Nobians	500.000	Muslims	Hamitic/ Semitic	same present place	N. Sudan
Barbarians	15.000.000	Muslims	Hamitic/ Semitic	same present place	Morocco-Algeria Tunisia-Lybia

Source: Saad Eddin Ibrahim. 1992, **Reflection on the Question of Minorities.** (In Arabic). Cairo, Ibn Khaldoun Center.

Most of these figures are approximations estimated or prorated from the following sources:

A.W. Homani, **Minorities in the Arab World,** London: Oxford University Press. 1974.

'. Gellner and C. Micand (Editors), **Arabs and Berbers.** London: Duckworth, 1973.

O. Beshir, **The Southern Sudan: Background to Conflict:** Khartoum: Khartoum -sity Press, 2nd Impression, 1970.

1 Tables, Published for the World Bank by the Johns Hopkins University Press. :, 1 980.

Maclourin (Editor), **The Political Role of Minority Groups in the Middle** York: Praeger, 1979 (Appendix B, pp. 268-287).

Table (B): Non-Sunni Islamic Sects at the Beginning of 1990s

Non-Sunni Islamic	The Total Number Sects in the Arab World	The Century in which the Sect appeared	Regions of Centralization according to their importance
- Shia' Twelvers	10.000.000	7th/9th	Iraq-Lebanon-the Gulf countries
-Zaydies	3.500.000	8th	Yemen-South the Arab Peninsula
-Ismaelies	300.000	8th	Syria-Lebanon-Iraq-The Gulf Countries
-Druz	1.350.000	11th	Syria-Lebanon-Occupied Palestine-Israel
- Alawites	3.000.000	9th	Syria-Lebanon
- Abadhi Kharajites	1.500.000	7th	Oman-Algeria-Tunisia
Total	19.650.000		

Source: Saad Eddin Ibrahim, 1992, **Reflection on the Question of Minorities.** (In Arabic), Cairo, Ibn Khaldoun Center.

Most of these figures are approximations, reached by the same two methods noted in Tables 1 and 2 (the last official enumeration plus the percentage of natural increase; that is similar to the natural increase of the total number of inhabitants in the countries where those groups live to the following years of the last census. Or, taking the average of the maximum and minimum mentioned estimations in the trustworthy references dealing with that topic.

We mainly depended on the following references:

- A. W. Homani, **Minorities in the Arab World.** London: Oxford University Press, 1974.

- Michael Hudson, **Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy.** New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1977.

E. Gellner and C.M. Cand (Editors) **Arabs and Berbers,** London: Duckworth, 1973.

orld Tables, published for the World Bank by the Johns Hopkins University Press, nore. 1980.

25

Table (C): Non-Islamic Religious Minorities in the Arab World in the late 1980s.

Non-Islamic Religious Minorities	Total no. in the Arab World	Regions of centralization according to their importance
1. The Christians:	12.000.000	
The Greek (Roman)		
Orthodox	1.900.000	Syria-Lebanon-Jordan-Palestine
Notorious	900.000	Syria-Iraq-Lebanon
The Monophistes	6.560.000	
The Coptic Orthodox	5.600.000	Egypt-Sudan
The Yaccohian Orthodox	225.000	Syria-Lebanon
The Armenian Orthodox	600.000	Syria-Lebanon-Jordan-Iraq-Egypt
The Catholics	3.250.000	
The followers of the		Sudan-Syria-Lebanon-Palestine-
Western Latin Church	625.000	Egypt
(The Greek-Roman Catholics)	500.000	Lebanon-Syria-Egypt
The Catholic Syrians	8.000	Lebanon-Syria
The Armenian Catholics	85.000	Lebanon-Syria
The Copts (the Roman Catholics)	170.000	Egypt-Sudan
The Kaldenians	625.000	Iraq-Syria-Lebanon
The Maronites	1.150.000	Lebanon-Syria
The Protestants	200.000	Sudan-Lebanon-Syria-Egypt
2. The Jews	4.700.000	
The Rabbanites Orthodox	4.400.000	Occupied Palestine/ the West Countries
Qarites	150.000	Occupied (Israel)-the East Countries
Sammartais	150.000	Israel
3. Hetrodox Religion Sector	5.690.000	
a. Sabians	150.000	Iraq
b. Yazidies	125.000	Iraq
c. Bohais	50.000	Occupied Palestine (Israel)-Iraq
d. Tribal Negro Religions	4.500.000	Sudan
The Total of non-Islamic Religious Minorities	22.390.000	

Source: Saad Eddin Ibrahim, 1992. **Reflection on the Question of Minorities.** (In Arabic). Cairo, Ibn Khaldoun Center.

Most of these figures are approximations, reach by two methods. The last official enumeration plus the percentage of natural increase that is similar to the natural increase

26

of the total of inhabitants in the countries where those groups live, for the years following the last census. Or, taking the average of the maximum and minimum estimates mentioned in the trustworthy references dealing with the topic.

We mainly depended on the following references:

- Robert B. Betts. **Christians in the Arab East: A Political Study.** Athens: Layacabettus Press. 1975.

- A.H. Homani. **Minorities in the Arab World.** London: Oxford University Press. 1974.

- M.O. Beshir. **The Southern Sudan. Background to Conflict.** Khartoum: Khartoum University Press. 1970.

- **World Tables.** Published for the World Bank by the John Hopkins University Press. Baltimore. 1980.

- R.D. Maclaurin (Editor). **The Political Role of Minority Groups in the Middle East.** New York: Praeger. 1979 (Appendix B. pp. 268-287).

END NOTES

[1] For a recent overview of worldwide ethnic conflicts, see Diamond, Larry and Marc F. Plattner (editors). **Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict, and Democracy.** Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1994.

[2] For details and documentation see, Ibrahim, Saad Eddin. **Sects, Ethnicity, and Minority Groups in the Arab World.** (in Arabic) Cairo: Ibn Khaldoun Center, 1994, pp. 15-18, and pp. 225-290), pp. 323-369, and pp. 601-629.

[3] Ibid. pp. 725-749.

[4] See also Diamond and Plattner's definition in **Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict,** op.cit. p. XVII; Fukuyama, Francis, "The End of History," **The National Interest,** No. 16 (summer 1989) pp. 3-18, and Idem, **The End of History and the Last Man.** New York: Free Press, 1992, p. 201.

[5] For full account of civil armed conflicts in Iraq, Sudan, and Lebanon, see Ibrahim, Saad Eddin, **Sects, Ethnicity and Minority Groups...** op.cit pp. 225-290, pp. 323-360, and pp 601-629.

[6] Ibid. pp. 14-15.

[7] A full debate has raged among Arab intellectuals over a proposed conference on the "U N Declaration on Minorities' Rights and Peoples of the Arab World and the Middle East" that was to be held in Cairo May 12-14, 1994. The prominent Egyptian writer and journalist, M.H. Haikal led the charge against the conference in an article "The Copts are an Integral Part of the National Mass" **Al-Ahram,** April 20, 1994. Some 240 Arab intellectuals joined the debate between April and September 1994. Two-thirds of the debators denied the existence or belittled the minorities issue in the Arab World. See **Civil Society and Democratic Transformation in the Arab World (CSDTAW)** Newsletter, April - October 1994.

[8] For an account of socio-political developments see, Ibrahim, Saad Eddin, **The Future of Society and State in the Arab World.** (in Arabic), Amman: The Arab Thought Forum,

1988; Hudson, Mickael, **Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy.** New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980; Luciani, G. (editors), **The Arab State.** Berkely: University of Press, 1990.

9 Korn, George, **Variety of Religions and Regimes.** A Comparative Sociological and Legal Study, (Beirut: El Nahar Publishing Center, 1979) pp. 196-261 (Arabic).

10 Megezil, Joseph, "Islam and Arab Christianity, Arab Nationalism and Secularism" in **The Seminar of Arab Nationalism and Islam.** pp. 361-384 (Arabic). Zuraique, Constantine in his comment on Kawthrany, Waguih research, "The Christians from the System of Sects to the Modern State", in his book **The Debate of Arab Christians** (p 75), El Shair, Gamal, "What are the Reasons of Susceptibility and What are their Ranges?" in the Debate of **Minorities in the Arab East and the Attempts of Israel to Use Them.** Amman 12-15/9/1981. (Arabic)

11 See the proceedings of the Constituent Conference of al Baath Party as they were narrated in Aflaq, Michael, **For the Cause of Baath.** Beirut, El Tali'a Publishing Center, 1978. First Part p. 121. (Arabic) For more information about the Baath's attitude towards Minorities: See: Dandeshly, Mostafa: **The Arab Socialist Baath Party,** Part 1: Ideology and Political History, Beirut, El Talia Publishing Center 1979, pp. 92-95. Also, see Al-Duri, A. "The Historical Roots of Arab Nationalism" in Hopkins, N. and Ibrahim, Saad Eddin (editors), Arab Society, Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, Second Edition. 1985, pp. 20-35.

12 See Yassin, El Sayed and others: **Content Analysis of the National Arab Thought.** (Beirut: the Center of Arab unity Studies, 1980). p. 52. (Arabic)

13 See Al Hosary, Sati: "What is Nationalism?" Beirut The Center of Arab Unity Studies, 1985 (originally published in 1958) p. 175. (Arabic)

14 Diamond and Plattner, **op.cit.** p. XVIII.

15 Packradoni, Karim, "Toward Ethnically Egalitarian Arab Societies" a paper submitted to the conference on **The UN Declaration on Minorities' Rights and Peoples of the Arab World and the Middle East,** Limassol, Cyprus, May 12-14, 1994.

16   See the **1993 Arab Strategic Report.** Cairo: Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies. 1994.

17   The Iraqi elite led by Saddam Hussain's clan since 1968, comes from the Arab Sunni Muslim town of Takrit.   The Sunni Muslims of Iraq do not exceed 35% of Iraqi's total population - compared to over 45.0% Arab Shi'i Muslims, and 15.0% Kurdish Muslims.   The Syrian elite led by Hafez al-Assad's clan since 1970s, comes from a small Alawite Shia'a sect which constitutes no more than 16.0% of Syria's total population (see Appendix Tables A and B).

18   See an analysis of recent events in **Civil Society and Democratic Transformation in the Arab World (CSDTAW),** Newsletter. April - August issues of 1994.

19   Review constitutional texts and similar documents of Arab Countries in   Sarhal, Ahmed, **Political and Constitutional Systems in Lebanon and the Arab Countries:** Beirut-El Baath Publishing Center, 1980 (Arabic).

20   Ibid

21   Ibrahim, S. E., **Future of Society and State in the Arab World.** op.cit. pp. 400-450.

22 About the same topic in regard to the Arab World see:

- Karl W. Deutsch. "Social Mobilization and Political Development" in the **American Political Science** Review, Vol. 55, No, 3, September 1961, pp. 493, and **Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundation of Nationality.** Second Edition, Cambridge, Mass, MIT Press, 1966.

   Ibrahim S. E., **Bridging the Gap Between Decision-Makers and Intellectuals in the Arab World.** Amman, the Arab Thought Forum, 1984, pp. 16-32. (Arabic)

   Lerner, Daniel, **The Passing at Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East.** Glencoe, ILL: free Press, 1958.

- Harik, Iliya, "The Ethnic Revolution and Political Integration in the Middle East", International Journal of Middle East Studies, Vol. 3, No.3, July 1972, pp. 303, 323.

- Ghalyoum, Bourhan, The Sectarian Issue and the Problem of the Minorities, MMS, 1986, pp. 71-79. (Arabic).

23 Ibrahim, S.E., Sects, Ethnicity and Minority Groups., op.cit. pp. 735-740

24 Ibid. 840-860

25 Ibid 840-860

26 Minorities Concerns in the Arab World, 1993 Report, Cairo: Ibn Khaldoun Center, 1994, pp. 282-283

27 "The Berbers Demand a Voice", Al-Ahram Weekly, October 20, 1994, p. 5

28 Ibid

29 Minorities Concerns in the Arab World, the 1993 Annual Report, Cairo: Ibn Khaldoun Center, 1994.