

The Past is a Foreign Country¹: Unorthodox Minorities and the Middle Eastern State

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Abstract: This chapter establishes a framework for the analysis of the future fate of unorthodox ethno-religious communities in the MENA region. It accords centrality to acts of the state as they pertain to everyday practices of the citizens related to their sense of security and safety as defining features of belonging. A critical reading of the recent history of forced migration waves leading to *en masse* displacement of unorthodox minorities across the region offers a deeper perspective for us to understanding the making of the contemporary Middle Eastern states and societies in the larger context of the intimate relationship between statehood, national identity and forced migration. The specific experiences of unorthodox minorities in the Middle East reveal that strategies of dispossession cannot be limited to population transfers, legal arrangements for population movements, or refugee flows. There is a slower, subtler, and longer-term trend that emerged marking the relationship between states and unorthodox minorities in the Middle East.

Keywords: Unorthodox Minorities, Middle Eastern State, Belonging, Dispossession, Forced Migration, Exodus

¹ D. Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985, xv.

Introduction

This chapter strives to establish a framework for the study of the future fate of unorthodox ethno-religious communities in the MENA region. In this context, the terms MENA and the Middle East are used interchangeably as the latter is applied in a manner to include Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the Palestinian Authority, Tunisia, Turkey, UAE and Yemen. The main question addressed here is whether there is a well-defined historical trend of dispensing with unorthodox minority groups and if this tendency has been exacerbated in the period following the events of the Arab Spring (2011-2020).

The changing nature of the ‘Middle Eastern state’ in an age characterized by hyper-globalization and neo-colonialism is a topic of considerable debate in both scholarly circles and political discussions (Gupta et al. 2006, 278). In particular, the role and status of the state in terms of different perceptions about what its’ functions are constitute a debate yet to be settled almost a century after independence from colonial and imperial rule in the region (Wucherpfenig et al., 2016). The critical approach I espouse in this chapter accords centrality to acts of the state as they pertain to everyday practices of the citizens related to their sense of security and safety. This perspective is predicated upon the integration of political, economic, social, structural, and institutional aspects of belonging, and hitherto, dispossession in the nation-cum-state (Ma’Oz 1998). In this sense, it marks an area above and beyond the employment of notions of good-governance or governmentality (Fox 2013). If anything, such a perspective may best be described as an attempt to analyze trends of internal colonialism whereby the state works by multiplying sites of regulation and domination through the creation of semi-autonomous entities of governance targeting special groups in the population and creating spatio-temporal realities of legalized exclusion (Scott 1988, Lefebvre and Nicholson-Smith 1991). Furthermore, these structures and practices are rendered only partially visible to the larger public and they are declared immune from the standard checks and balances in place in terms of the control of the excesses of institutional forms of exercise of power.

In this context, I argue that a critical reading of the recent history of forced migration waves leading to *en masse* displacement of unorthodox minorities across the region offers a timely

intervention concerning the use of a limited concept of statehood inherited from the immediate independence era (Ther in Ther and Siljak 2011). An added question is what kinds of additional qualities came into effect that shaped the behaviour of Middle Eastern states towards their citizens during the last three decades as a result or in relation to the global context (Haque 2008, 12-13). Needless to say, while positioning this particular subset of states in a transnational context is important, this should not be done at the expense of its unique and historically distinct characteristics. The geographical trajectories of displacement from and in the MENA states, especially the dispossession of unorthodox minorities, the causes and consequences of such multi-stage movements of dispossession, cannot be understood in isolation from the meanings that are reinforced, contested and created through such acts of statehood (Bohac 2019). To re-insert the actuality of inequalities emanating from systemic dislocation and suffering through a mapping of shifts in not the actual but political borders of nationhood and the accompanying re-inscription of boundaries of belonging is an essential part of this exercise (Gupta and Ferguson 1992).

History and Memory: Societal Amnesia of Dispossession

Forced migration and dispossession of the minorities in the region is closely associated with processes of construction and reconstruction of the modern state – yet refugees and internally displaced populations rarely appear on chronicles of nationalism other than as threats, enemies within, or non-status populations (Zolberg et al., 1989). This chapter is focused on the question of the reasons behind the excision of unorthodox minorities from histories of nationhood. What accounts for the amnesia of professional historians who have neglected countless mass displacements? This question could only be answered if state formation and forced migration are treated as integrated processes, setting out a case for a new approach to histories of displacement in the region. A critical examination of the dominant perception of ‘forced migration as a problem’ or ‘as an exception’ would be the end result of such an approach. Although a singular theory of forced migration is neither possible nor desirable, re-embedding forced migration research in a more general understanding of contemporary Middle Eastern states and societies and their histories, and linking it to broader theories of social and political change across the region is a must. The conceptual framework for forced migration studies should regard social and political transformation as its central category, and strive to facilitate an understanding of the complexity,

interconnectedness, variability and contextuality of migratory processes. Determination of patterns of forced migration as an exemplary aspect of a commitment to truly contextualize and in the end, 'normalize' forced migration in terms of our understanding of the Middle Eastern state.

All national histories are given popular currency by spectacles that mark foundational events and episodes or that celebrate the lives of key figures – “mothers” and “fathers” of the nation, pioneers, martyrs, and victims of war and civil conflict (Kumaraswamy 2003). And yet, all such histories depend on absences and silences. In this vein, it is not surprising that research on the Middle East has been largely silent on linguistic and religious minorities' retainment as citizens regardless of regime types in the region (Nga Longva and Roald 2011, White 2012, Nisan 2015). It is true that there are minorities whose status are threatened by a transition to majoritarian decision-making and democratization of institutions, as witnessed in the case of Alawites in Syria (Gewin 1998). However, the majority of unorthodox minorities are not even considered as legitimate actors in national politics and their fate has been and is fundamentally different than that of those favoured by the Syrian regime (Kumaraswamy 2003, 245). The region has been home to a multitude of communities who are deemed as distinct from the majority and hence regarded as separate from the dominant national identity because of their religious beliefs and practices, ethno-linguistic roots, cultural identities and when applicable, their expressed desire for regional autonomy. In this regard, Albert Hourani's traditional definition of minorities as those peoples whose identify differed from Sunni Arabs in Egypt, Mandate of Palestine, Transjordan, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq does not suffice (Hourani 2013). Instead, a much more fluid attribution is required to address the situation and treatment of various Arab Christian denominations including Copts, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Maronites, Latins and Protestants, heterodox or unorthodox Islamic sects such as Shias, Alawis, Alevites of Turkey, the Druze, non-Arabs Sunni Muslim groups such as Kurds, Circassians and Turkomans, as well as non-Arab and non-Muslim communities such as Jews, Armenians, Assyrians, and, Christian tribes and animists in southern Sudan (Kumaraswamy 2006).

Whether they are classified under the heading of religious minorities (Jews, Christian dominations such as Copts, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Maronites, Latins and Protestants, Israeli Arabs), ethno-national minorities (Kurds, Druze, Armenians, Circassians, Assyrians, animists of southern Sudan, Berbers, Turkomans, Israeli Arabs), heterodox or unorthodox Muslim

minorities (Alawis, Druze, Ahmadias, Ismailis, Bahais), political minorities (Alevi in Turkey, Shias in Saudi Arabia, Sunnis in Iran), or majoritarian minorities (Shias in Iraq and Bahrain, Sunnis in Syria, Sunnis in Lebanon and Palestinians in Jordan), many of these communities share the common characteristic of potential or real political marginalization, cultural vulnerability and a history of socio-economic precarity (Bayat 2012). The official and public denial of their status as legitimate members of the MENA states only add to their problem-laden condition. It is true that massive demographic redistribution, population engineering and mass displacements in the form of large-scale transfer and exchange of minority populations have drastically reshaped the ethnic composition of present-day Middle East. Yet, it did not change the realities facing the unorthodox minorities, many of whom were the ultimate candidates for a civic, supra-national identity on account of not fitting any particular ethnic, religious or linguistic category. Their dispossession happened during the post-independence period. In examining the evolution of refugee policies in the post-independence Middle East, there are often four major events cited characterizing the region, the foundation of the state of Israel and Palestinian refugee problem, 1990-1991 Iran-Iraq war, 2002-2003 'Gulf Crises', and the Syrian exodus. None of these sequences of mass displacement address the question of unorthodox minorities in the region other than as a sub-heading.

To understand the relationship between forced migration and unorthodox minorities requires a careful interrogation of fundamental concepts such as fluidity of citizenship status, boundaries of indigeneity and determination of national belonging. These categories of difference have been both augmented and exacerbated by processes of state formation and its bordering strategies. Issues of structural inequality and differential access to opportunities and resources, coupled up with politics of identity further accentuate the operations of differential regimes of belonging in the region. Resultant movements of dispossession and mass expulsions mark the historical condition of unorthodox minorities regardless of the regime type they live under, including but not limited to populist presidential systems, authoritarian parliamentary coalitions and sectarian governments.

Consequently, since the 1950s, remarkable processes of population engineering have been taking place in the region coupled with societal amnesia concerning histories of nationhood.

Furthermore, after the failed democratization attempts of the Arab Spring, many of the countries with unorthodox minority populations experienced an extremely violent second wave of dispossession (Zabad 2017). Iraq, Syria and Egypt are paramount examples of such cases in terms of the radical approach they assumed to address long-standing ethno-religious divisions among the native populace. While Iraq in particular opted for a policy assemblage based on ethno-religious amnesia towards the unorthodox minorities, Syria tried an integrationist policy centred around a presumed albeit dictatorially sustained civic identity, and Egypt has institutionalized societal segmentation of Coptic Christians who were once recognized as an integral part of the modern Egyptian statehood (Belge and Karakoc 2015). In line with earlier traditions of unofficial practices of graded citizenship, in Yemen, Sudan, Iran and Turkey, on the other hand, unorthodox minority identities were reconstructed in such a way that they became the outliers to be absorbed into the modality of political transitions in these countries. The result was the emergence of seemingly divergent policies concerning the status of unorthodox minorities. And yet, in almost all cases displacement, dispossession, or exodus became the common-denominator distinguishing their treatment and experiences of belonging from the rest of the population.

Mapping Out Difference: Status Determination of Minorities in the MENA

A critical survey of the general context of disenfranchisement and displacement affecting unorthodox ethno-religious minorities in the MENA region reveals the following characteristic features. First and foremost, unorthodox minority communities have been the most susceptible group to successive waves of turbulence engulfing the region since the Second World War. Secondly, many of these communities suffered displacement that resulted from mass political violence and institutionally sanctioned socio-economic loss, to the point that some virtually vanished from the region. Finally, despite the historical roots and widespread presence of unorthodox ethno-religious minorities across the region, these communities have been treated as threats and experienced various forms of formal and informal exclusion due to their beliefs, practices and communal identity by the post-colonial and post-imperial states both before and after the Arab Spring (Nga Longva and Roald 2011).

The revolutionary upheavals since 2011 under the aegis of the Arab Spring have prompted further chaos and fear for the minority communities and reinforced the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism throughout the region. Based on the use of historical sources as well as accounts provided by the diaspora communities who escaped from their countries of origin, the question of ethno-linguistic, sectarian and religious minorities' problem-laden relationship with the majority populations became much more pronounced. In particular, looking at the gradual exodus of the Copts in Egypt, the Druze and Middle Eastern Christians in Syria and Iraq, the Zaydis in Yemen and the Alevis in Turkey, it is apt to posit that post-2011 Middle East has witnessed increased politicization of religious authority across the Middle East and this has had markedly negative effects on unorthodox faith communities. Unfolding political and social developments, along with steadily shifting stance of the state vis-à-vis these minority communities has propelled them to seek refuge first within and then across national borders in both Sunni and Shi'a majority societies.

The ramifications of the 2011 Arab uprisings continue to unfold with multiple international and domestic implications. Except in Tunisia, what optimistically started as the Arab Spring has ushered in either civil wars—in Libya, Syria, and Yemen—or, after some turmoil, a reassertion of authoritarian rule as it happened in Egypt and Bahrain. Iraq, which had been the scene to a bloody civil war since the country's 2003 invasion and occupation by the United States and allies, was also thrown into further chaos as the ripple effects of the 2011 uprisings reached its borders. Amidst the ensuing turmoil across the region, unorthodox minority communities were profoundly affected. Some of the smaller communities, most notably the Yezidis in northern Iraq, bore the brunt of the brutalities of war. Others, such as Middle Eastern Christian communities are all but erased from the region via forced migration and land confiscations in multiple states.

Contextualizing Statehood

In the Middle East, political histories of nationhood directly inform the perception and treatment of unorthodox minorities. We can identify at least three historical legacies in the region that have shaped trajectories of differential treatment: Ottoman-Islamic and imperial legacy of minority accommodation which had very limited application in the case of unorthodox minorities,

ethno-religious markers of class structure that emerged as a result of the region's integration to world markets since the nineteenth century which led to politically staged transfers of capital and assets to create national bourgeoisie, and post-independence pattern of largely authoritarian secularism and opposition by populist Islamist movements which then led to the region-wide resurgence of political Islam and further marginalization of unorthodox minorities. Based on a comparison of the unorthodox ethno-religious minorities in Turkey, Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Iraq, Iran and Syria, I will argue that unorthodox minorities became increasingly excluded from the neo-nationalist projects while ethno-linguistic minorities had to engage in political and rights struggles but by and large did not leave the state *en masse*.

During the Egyptian uprising of January 2011, for instance, Coptic Christians participated in the demonstrations against Hosni Mubarak although the Coptic Pope was known for his long-standing support for the Mubarak regime (Monier 2014). Protection of the rights of minorities in Egypt, and for our purposes here Copts qualify as unorthodox minorities, and demands for the enjoyment of full citizenship remains as a challenge for the post-Arab Spring Egypt. Radical and Islamist politics did empower the masses by loosening grip of many an Arab dictatorship. However, concerns around the belonging, security and political representation for unorthodox minorities did not wane. The forceful overlap between religion and the state rarely works in favour of these communities (Al Issawi 2011). Indeed, although Pope Shenouda III admonished against participating in the uprising, Coptic Christians joined protestors in Tahrir Square and even formed a human chain around Muslim demonstrators during the Friday prayers (Belge and Karakoc 2015). As the Egyptian transition unfolded, however, the anticipation of freedom, security and recognition for the Copts transition grew weaker (Zabad 2017). With the Muslim Brotherhood's consolidation of power in 2012, there was a surge of sectarian violence against Copts. In this spirit, Pope Tawadros II, who succeeded Pope Shenouda III in November 2012, publicly stated his support for Ahmed Shafik, a senior commander in the Egyptian Air Force under Hosni Mubarak for the presidential candidate (Tadros 2014). The continuation of sectarian hatred and discriminatory behaviour under the regime of President Abdel Fatah Al-Sisi only made the matters worse. Meanwhile, Sisi avoids the 'Coptic question' in the name of upholding national unity, which led to multiple waves of recent exodus effecting Egypt's Coptic communities (Guirguis 2018). Coptic Egyptian immigrants have primarily settled in Europe, North America, and

Australia. There have been a notable diaspora movement for the perpetuation of their religious and cultural identity. Connecting diaspora Coptic communities with the ‘mother church’ in Egypt, as well as raising awareness about the marginalization and persecution of remaining Copts in Egypt have become the distinguishing aspects of Coptic politics in the diaspora, especially so in the wake of the Arab Spring. The “global collaborative academic project of the digital Claremont Coptic Encyclopedia” is a prime example of the diasporic undertakings in this regard. Forming what is described as ‘borderless territoriality,’ the loss of their social, religious, cultural and political membership in contemporary Egypt is paving the way for the emergence of a bona fide diasporic existence, though not by choice (Westbrook and Saad 2017).

The experience of the Coptic minority in Egypt reveals the ubiquitous nature of normalized state violence both before and after the Arab Spring. As such, it invites us to reflect on the implicit assumptions we may harbour about state violence in the MENA region. Does it apply to any and every member of opposition? Or, does it assume a particular form concerning the treatment of unorthodox minorities? The social construction and political scapegoating of these communities as existential threats to existing as well as past regimes justifies the ‘special measures’ taken against them. However, here my aim is not to reveal the exceptionalism of state violence against unorthodox minorities, but to contextualize it in terms of highlighting the role played by non-state actors in the naturalization of systemic practices of othering.

Of course, it is important to note that there are exceptions. One such case concerns the Berber communities of Morocco. North Africa is characterized by its diverse religious, cultural and linguistic groups and a remarkable heterogeneity of identities. Berbers and Arabs are the two main ethnic groups in the region, compare to other Middle Easterns and sub-Saharanans. Coincident with the Arabization of the region with the spread of Islam, Berbers became a minority mainly residing in contemporary Morocco and Tunisia. Very similar to Egypt’s Coptic Christians, Morocco’s Berber community also participated in the Moroccan protest movement of February 20, 2011, alongside Islamists, trade unionists, and secular youth. In the case of Morocco, King Mohammad VI enacted a new Constitution which recognized Tamazight (the language of Morocco’s Berber minority) as one of the official languages. It is true that Mohammad VI’s

reforms had a soothing effect on protest movement. Although Morocco did not fully democratize, it also did not undergo a reconsolidation of authoritarianism in the way Egypt did. Both the Islamist Justice and Development Party (JDP) and Berbers emerged as key beneficiaries of the reform process. This combination, however, is an exception in the region rather than signifying a dominant trend in terms of the treatment of unorthodox minorities.

Politics of Identity and its Limits

The establishment of a rights framework generally allows for greater representation of minority interests (Gurr 1993). Civil and political rights, such as the freedom of speech and association or the prohibition of discrimination, are essential for minorities' sense of security and their ability to participate in everyday life of the polity (Trouillot 2001). Meanwhile, the sharper the class divisions, the less likely is the scenario for identity cleavages often accompanied by economic conflicts would dissolve (Keyder 1987, Kuran 2004). The predominant argument in almost all of the Middle Eastern states is that minorities, but especially non-Muslim or unorthodox ones, are disproportionately represented among the wealthy and thus democratization movements may end up actually targeting the very minorities they are in principle to protect. Furthermore, conflicts arising from disagreements about the role of religion in public life, focusing on the regulation of religious education, the financing and autonomy of religious institutions and officials, the status of religious law within state law, are not friendly contexts for unorthodox minorities to stake claims for their rights.

The next question to consider is how did minorities position themselves during the establishment of independent nation-states in the region? There are notable dilemmas that regime change poses for minorities in the Middle East. Until the uprisings of 2011, which politicized ethnic identities exponentially, the study of authoritarian resilience of the Middle Eastern state has developed almost entirely without intersecting with the study of religious and linguistic diversity in each of these societies. The central focus has been exclusively on class conflict. Scholarship in this tradition has examined either the configuration of class alliances that are conducive to regime change or introduction of group rights. The role of other markers of belonging and identity that

necessitated or stood in the way of safety and security, as well as guarantees for citizenship status, have been largely ignored. This is despite the fact that particularly at times of instability and crisis, the liaisons between unorthodox communities and the state often became irreversibly disrupted, effecting their access to economic and political resources as well as their physical safety and security.

In the Middle East, secularization reforms accompanying the initial phase of the nation-state project have included measures such as the closing of religious schools, the nationalization of mosques, and the abolishing of Shari'a courts. These measures benefitted unorthodox minorities more so than the population who held strong religious sentiments. With the current turn of the tide towards populist Islamist politics, following decades of suppression of Islamist parties and movements, they then became the most obvious targets for the new articulations of the secular-religious divide. In other words, the Arab Spring in effect rendered the position of unorthodox minorities ever more vulnerable.

Where state-building has accentuated the secular-religious divide in politics by weakening, subordinating or co-opting religious institutions and suppressing religious movements, however, non-Muslim minorities had very limited means of surviving populist movements of religious revivalism. In fact, with the overt Islamization of public life, they have become all too visible. This is despite the fact that there are differences in state-building trajectories to be taken account. Republican regimes including Turkey, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Syria, and Iraq (until 2003) have followed a state-building path through institutionalized secularization until the late 1990s. Such circumstances created a history of relative ability for unorthodox minorities to survive and relatively invisible. Monarchies such as Morocco, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states and democracies such as Israel and Lebanon, on the other hand, integrated religion to both public life and to law in varying degrees (Weiss 2010). This latter condition provided relative autonomy to unorthodox minorities who were associated with an established church, and yet made life all the more difficult for other communities who were self-standing in their faith and rituals. Overall, however, both monarchies and republics have suppressed unorthodox religious movements and historical allegiances between the state elite and populist nationalist movements often made them one of the first targets of public upheavals, lootings and uprisings.

Here, it is important to note that although ethnicity refers to a variety of descent-based identity categories, including religion, sect, language, race, and caste, it does not always mark these communities in terms of their difference from the majority in irreconcilable terms. Most salient political divides in the Middle East are not based on ethnicity, but based on belonging to Abrahamic religions and sectarian identities and historically regarded as non-negotiable. In some authoritarian regimes, the ruling elite tended to be based on sect, such as Syria's Alawite minority, Bahrain's Sunni minority, and Iraq's Sunni minority until 2003. But none of these groups were unorthodox in their religious identity. Furthermore, most states in the MENA region are ruled by linguistic and religious majorities, which then creates multiple forms of vulnerability for unorthodox minorities living in their midst. In societies where the state is already "owned" by the ethno-religious majority, the implications of belonging for minorities are far more fluid and often transient. This is despite the fact that some unorthodox minorities have secured certain collective rights and achieved a certain level of economic prosperity and political salience, while others have secured little recognition and very limited degree of group rights. Unorthodox minorities who do not have institutionalized rights are likely to expect not more but actually less positive benefits from a change in the *status quo* since they were not considered an organic part of the nation or the public in the first place.

Different historical legacies shape unorthodox minorities' interests, life chances and their relationship with the state, yet with two caveats. First, historically constituted divisions and conflicts structure the interests, vulnerabilities and preferences of these distinct communities across the region. Second, regime change bears particular kinds of risks for unorthodox minorities regardless of their previous standing vis-à-vis the political elite. Even the introduction of greater protection of civil and political rights are less likely to reduce the risks for minorities if they are not considered as worthy of protection and thus subjected to differential application of these new rights regimes.

Historical Legacies

There are at least three distinct historical legacies, each of which has specific implications for unorthodox minorities in the region (Belge and Karakoc 2015). The first one is related to the allocation of select rights based on the Ottoman *millet* system. Combined with the policies of the colonial powers and those of the successor states, largely “froze” ethnic cleavages in the Middle East and often to the detriment of unorthodox minorities. This is an old debate, and starting with Kemal Karpat’s work, it is now agreed upon that Ottoman Empire divided its populations into different religion clusters [of the Book and hence no allowances were made for unorthodox groups] rather than different ethnicities (Karpat 1968, Laqueur 2016). Until its final decades, the Ottoman Empire refused to recognize ethnic distinctions, a tide which turned with the birth of Turkish nationalism. And contrary to the glorification of the millet system as an equitable form of governance, it is important to underline the fact that Muslims always constituted the dominant and privileged group, while non-Muslim minorities (*dhimmis*) were entitled to protection and a select body rights pertaining to self-governance, and yet had little if any of the rights and privileges accorded to the Muslim majority otherwise. Each of these communities (*millet*) were to be governed by their own religious leader, selected by its members and yet approved by the Sultan, in organizing their religious affairs, education, and family law. As a result, the notion of civic membership to the nation was almost null and void (Canefe 2002). The successor states of the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East, including Turkey, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan largely followed the legacy of defining minorities in religious terms and granted some degree of cultural autonomy to non-Muslims in the areas of religion, family law, and education. And yet, also in keeping with that same political tradition, Muslim or non-Muslim unorthodox minorities were not recognized as constituting distinct communities deserving rights, protection or any degree of autonomy in conducting their own affairs.

The Ottoman legacy of granting communal rights to non-Muslims but not recognizing different communities within the *umma* (the Muslim community) was further reinforced by the policies of the colonial powers taking hold of the MENA region in the aftermath of the First World War as well as the newly independent states. After World War I, for instance, Britain and France included minority rights in the legal framework they devised for the administration of the territories they controlled as colonies or mandates. These rights were modeled after those enumerated in the Minority Treaties imposed on Eastern European states after World War I

through the League of Nations (Jackson Preece 1998). They included non-discrimination and freedom of conscience, in addition to language rights and autonomy in education, religion, and family law. For instance, the 1928 law in the British Mandate of Transjordan allowing (religious) minorities to maintain their own schools and provide education in their own language is a case in point (Belge and Karakoc 2015). With an interesting twist, after the country's independence in 1946, this framework was preserved and Christian communities maintained their own religious courts, the right for autonomy in education, as well as being allocated reserved seats in the parliament based on their religious identity. This is despite the fact that since the 1960s, Christian minorities formed barely 6.5 percent of the population. In this sense, perhaps Jordan stands out as an exception in the region. When we examine the treatment of minorities in other Ottoman-successor states, a different picture emerges.

In Egypt, the Ottoman millet system was revised in a 1915 law that provided religious communities with the right to organize their religious and customary affairs, including family law, through communal council (Landau 2015). After the *coup* of 1952, the religious family law tribunals were abolished in 1955. However, civil courts continued to administer Christian law concerning Christian communities in the area of family matters, and applied the Coptic Orthodox Personal Status Ordinance of 1938. Both the 2012 and 2014 constitutional arrangements retained the protocol of Jewish and Christian law being applicable to matters pertaining to personal status, religious affairs and appointment of religious leaders (Scott 2017). In contrast to Jordan, however, Coptic representation in the Egyptian legislature remained markedly low and there are no measures taken concerning discrimination at work place or in public life. On the contrary, the treatment of the Coptic minority has been aptly coined as 'institutionalized violence.' (Guirguis 2017, 16) In terms of parliamentary representation, although past Egyptian presidents have used their appointment powers to include prominent members of the Coptic community in the legislature, overall rates have been steadily dropping compared to the proportion of Copts in post-independence Egyptian society.

In a larger context, several constitutional and statutory texts in the MENA region use the phrase 'personal laws' in order to determine the rules applicable to family matters such a marriage, divorce, maintenance and inheritance. However, this term is not only extremely vague. It also leads

to a false image of the minority communities being provided the protection and constitutional guarantees in terms of their treatment in the eyes of the state as well as by the society at large. Furthermore, different categories of minority status led to variant forms of reception in terms of rights claims and personal laws coverage is not easily extended to linguistic or educational rights. For instance, ethno-linguistic minorities that shared the dominant religion, such as the Kurds, continued to demand rights and autonomy since the interwar years. However, they had far less success in securing legal and constitutional guarantees compared to the recognized non-Muslim minorities historically designated as dhimmis under the Imperial order. Rather urgent a topic at present, Kurds of Turkey received a promise of autonomy in the Sèvres Treaty (1920) following the Empire's defeat in World War I. And yet, the Lausanne Treaty (1923) that the Turkish Republic negotiated after its War of Independence had no such provisions. This is in contradistinction with the rights of non-Muslims in education and religion, which were codified in the Lausanne Treaty. The establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 was followed by a long series of Kurdish uprisings. In response, successive governments formulated assimilationist policies, the key components of which included a ban on publications and broadcasting in Kurdish (until 1991), repressive measures against the expression of ethnic identity, and efforts to make Turkish the mother tongue of all citizens of Turkey. Even worse was the situation of Kurds who were members of unorthodox faith communities, Druze, and the Yezidi. Amongst them, communities who were classified as unorthodox in terms of their religious identification were most suspect in their societal reception. They also became the easiest targets in civil strife and regional warfare. In the particular case of Yezidis, violence assumed a cyclical character, and multiple forms of state criminality as well as waves of societal prosecution decimated the community in most brutal ways during the opening two decades of the 21st century (Ali 2019). The ancient unorthodox faith of Yezidism have become victims of egregious forms of violation and exploitation (including sexual slavery) committed by the Jihadist group Islamic State of Iraq and Syria from 2010 onwards. The uniqueness of their religious beliefs and practices, divergence of their life style from the dominant Sunni and Arabic culture in the region rendered their suffering virtually invisible despite the undeniable evidence of mass killings. Alleviation of the continuing deterioration of Yezidi communities is a very slim probability and the only option for remaining alive presents itself in exodus and exile.

Another example is Morocco, which became a French Protectorate in 1912. As an unorthodox minority, the Rifian Berbers initiated a rebellion and briefly established a Rifian Republic with its own currency (1923–1926). By 1930, the French colonial government enacted the so-called Berber Dahir and ‘granted’ the Amazigh people the right to apply their tribal laws in their own courts (Belge and Karakoc 2015). However, this arrangement did not entail territorial autonomy or linguistic rights, and it was summarily abolished as soon as Morocco gained independence. Instead, the urban-based nationalist movement pursued policies aiming for the consolidation of a distinctly Islamic-Arab identity, particularly stressing the significance of the Arabic language for Moroccan national identity. Berber uprisings followed in 1957, 1958, and 1960, and Berber politics led to the mobilization of rural constituencies by the Popular Movement Party. The Berbers were finally able to secure the status of Tamazight as an official language in the aftermath of the Arab Spring (Thompson 2013). Their religious practices, however, are still regarded as unorthodox. In a similar fashion, in Syria, French colonial administration granted the right to self-government to heterodox Muslim minorities such as Alawites and Druzes between 1920 and 1936. Following a similar pattern to that of the treatment of Kurdish minorities, this arrangement was ended based on a treaty negotiated between France and the Syrian nationalist movement in 1936. At the time of full independence of Syria in 1946, Muslim minorities such as Alawites, Druzes, or Kurds did not gain or retain any group rights, while the communal rights of select non-Muslim groups were recognized. It is true that these policies compare unfavorably to the guarantees and support granted to Christian minorities in Jordan. However, even in the case of Jordan, unorthodox ethno-religious communities are not recognized in terms of rights and constitutional protections.

What followed in the aftermath of the Arab Spring no doubt constitutes a new chapter in terms of the treatment and status of unorthodox minorities in the Middle East. Research on the relationship between transformation of political institutions and civil wars, especially independence struggles, has generally paid insufficient attention to the role of invention and calcification of national identities at the expense of unorthodox communities. Furthermore, ethnographic data is often only available in colonial registers of administration and ceases to be collected and collated during post-independence period. This is due to the particular type of state-making policies dictating often either a singular ethno-religious identity or a dominant one as the main marker of national belonging. Overall, despite the exceptional history of Arab and Turkish

nationalisms in terms of creating an ethos of post-independence revitalization of the nation, excluded groups and communities from the registers of these new nations could rarely rely on state institutions to counter the risks of civil conflict, dispossession and finally exile.

In summary, the particular Ottoman practice of recognizing non-Muslim groups as communities entitled to a certain degree of autonomy in managing their affairs while denying this kind of autonomy to Muslim or non-Muslim unorthodox minorities, has had a lasting impact on how successor Middle Eastern states treated these distinct communities. As the above examples prove, the legacy of the *millet* system has been reinforced by the interwar-era policies as well as by the colonial administrators in the region who sought to codify the rights of non-Muslims modeled on the League of Nations framework. Unorthodox communities found some space for survival in the interstices of this overall framework through mechanisms of partial legal autonomy in running their communal affairs and nominal protection of their houses of worship. However, newly independent post-colonial and post-imperial regimes were most reluctant to recognize unorthodox Muslim minorities as separate communities eligible for such protection or group rights. As a result, although recognized non-Muslim religious minorities have secured some institutionalized rights even after independence, unorthodox communities were neither recognized nor benefitted from any institutional or constitutional protection. This asymmetric arrangement of group and collective rights created conditions under which unorthodox minorities remain vulnerable in perpetuity.

The second historical legacy, which has affected the fate of unorthodox minorities after independence to an even further degree, has to do with the political economy of the region's integration with the capitalist world market, related capital accumulation and wealth transfer strategies. Non-Muslim religious minorities, because of their relatively easier access to better education in missionary schools, their historic links with international business networks as middlemen, and their access to extraterritorial courts under the Ottoman Empire's pluralistic legal system concerning trade and commerce, were overrepresented in business, trade, and amongst the professional classes (Bozdogan and Kasaba 1997). Unorthodox minorities, in contrast, were more concentrated in rural and economically isolated regions, and often came from marginalized backgrounds. For instance, the Druze are an aggregate of communities living almost exclusively in the mountains of Syria, Lebanon and Israel whose millennial esoteric religion defy Arabian,

Persian or Turkish conventions of Muslim and non-Muslim belief. Their settlements in the mountainous regions of southeastern Turkey, northern Iraq and southeast Syria kept them away from the prying eyes of the states they resided in, until they began to pose threats to the progress of extractive industries and settled populations (Bartolomei 2018).

Perhaps the most notable example of this historical distinction between the situational characteristics of recognized and unorthodox minorities is the privilege and disproportionate accumulation of wealth by the Coptic minority. Copts were controlling about 25 percent of Egypt's total wealth by the late nineteenth century, which was duly undone by Nasser's land reform and nationalization policies through the redistribution of Coptic wealth to Muslims. The history of wealth transfer achieved by the Greco-Turkish population exchange (1922-23) and the mass exodus of Armenians of Asia Minor constitute other notable examples (Igsiz 2008). The relevance of legally sanctioned and institutionally orchestrated forced migration exemplified by the Greco-Turkish population exchange in 1923 for the creation of a new kind of collective memory of the nation has also been extensively studied (Yildirim 2007). In contrast, the provinces in which unorthodox minorities and sectarian communities of Turkey have been habitually residing are some of the most remote parts of the country. Their departure did not even require a major reordering of the remembrance of the things past due to their relatively small population, marginal economic position and overall invisible status in national politics. Still, they owned land and property which in time became valuable assets to be considered for expropriation. A key case to be considered in this context is that Suryani communities of Turkey and Syria (Albayrak 2011, Ozmen 2017). Descendants of these expelled or exiled populations carry the legacy of communal trauma and they are yet to share their memories with the public and openly challenge the established truth claims concerning the legacies of the Middle Eastern state.

The third legacy that shaped the experiences of both recognized and unorthodox minorities in the post-independence period has to do with the authoritarian features of Middle Eastern states in relation to first the containment of and then the political rise of Islamist movements in the region (Belge and Karakoc 2015). The majority of Middle Eastern states adopted Islam as a state religion while pursuing secularist policies that suppress the independent organization and political mobilization of religion until the 1990s. This pattern is particularly observable in the republican

regimes that emerged after independence, such as Turkey, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Algeria, and Tunisia. This list of states heavily regulated Islamic institutions, Islamic education and practical aspects of Islam including worship. In contradistinction, monarchies in Jordan and Morocco have been more willing to integrate religious symbols in public life and to mobilize religion for regime legitimation while containing the scope of activities of Islamist parties (Cesari 2018). When the tide turned, however, we saw the treatment of unorthodox minorities far worse by fundamentalist Islamist politics. Overall, democratization of Middle Eastern politics and entrance of political Islam into the scene in full force rendered unorthodox minorities more vulnerable, especially if there were histories of hostility to these communities from the Muslim majority.

In summary, we need to pay close attention to historical and political trajectories, including those related to ethnic nationalism, secularism, and political Islam, and the ways in which they interact with each other in order to understand the gradual dispensation of unorthodox minorities. Much of the literature on the Middle East state has focused on the strategies by which authoritarian regimes maintain their grip on power. A deeper understanding of how communities are affected both by authoritarian coalitions and opposition movements must start with an analysis of their overall positionality in the society. In this regard, the fate of unorthodox minorities constitutes the final litmus test as far as the utilization of forced migration is concerned in the making of contemporary Middle Eastern states and societies.

Conclusion

This paper strived to address the question of systemic characteristics of the treatment of unorthodox minorities in the Middle East. An overview of the institutional and societal aspects of the perception of these minorities provides a wealth of tools for understanding the Middle Eastern state itself. Given the global saliency of populist nationalism, however, traditions of governance embraced by the states in the MENA region cannot shed enough light on the consolidation of expulsion practices alone. Even the political-economy analysis dwelling on how these regimes saw the displacement and dispossession of their minorities as a quick and sure means of capital accumulation does not fully explain how they avoided accountability for their wrong-doings.

Furthermore, none of these theories attend to the pivotal role unorthodox minorities play in the consolidation of ethno-nationalist or religio-nationalist regimes in the region (Storm 2008). This is the missing link in the relevant literature concerning these seemingly idiosyncratic groups and state formation. The Middle East is a transcontinental region, with Arabs, Turks, Persians, Kurds and Azeris being the largest ethnic groups and Sunni or Shia Islam being the dominant religious denominations. Of the close to 380 million people populating 18 countries in the region, the Baloch, Assyrians, Berbers, Copts, the Druze, Lurs, Suryanis, Mandaeans, Shabaks, Zazas, Levantines, Pashtun, the Yezidi, the Bahai, Yakubis, Chaldanis, and many other unorthodox minorities amount only to less than 2 percent of the total population (Nisan 2015). And yet, they are always at the forefront of national agendas, revival movements, and each state positions itself first and foremost in relation to how to address the status of unorthodox minorities. Our challenge is to determine the patterns and pathways employed by the states in the region concerning the categorization, treatment and ultimately dispossession of these communities.

The links between forced migration and the ‘end of empire’ have been well covered on Ottoman, Turkish, Arab and Southeast European studies. What is much less discussed is what happens after the decline of imperial and colonial control followed by successor nationalisms, including regime changes within post-colonial/decolonized states. The willingness to place forced migration on a spectrum that includes policies indicating state criminality, such as ethnic cleansing, population displacement, and ultimately genocide, is not a welcoming spectre. However, from a global, comparative perspective, the specific experiences of unorthodox minorities in the Middle East reveal that strategies of dispossession cannot be limited to population transfers, legal arrangements for population movements, or refugee flows. There is a slower, subtler, and longer-term trend that emerged marking the relationship between states and unorthodox minorities in the Middle East. The creation of *de facto* categories and scales of citizenship ultimately led to the gradual erasure of ‘non-national’ people seen as not fit for political projects of liberation, national revival, and most recently, Islamist resurgence. What Dawn Chatty identified as the “residual” Ottoman tolerance “towards multiethnic and plural societies,” where the dispossessed have found “comfort and relief” was not applicable to the case of unorthodox minorities across the region (Chatty 2010). Questioning the idea of organically defined borders of nationhood, although recent scholarship emanating from the region makes serious attempts to move beyond the bind of

Eurocentrism in deciphering the behemoth of the Middle Eastern state, putting forced migration in a non-Eurocentric perspective reveals local realities that are equally hard to deal with (Van Hear in Black and Vaughan 1993, Castles and Miller 1998).

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