

Discrimination and Tolerance in the Middle East

Proceedings of the conference on Discrimination
and Tolerance in the Middle East organized by
the Lebanese American University (LAU)
and the Orient-Institut Beirut (OIB),
May 2-4, 2007

Edited by Ray Jabre Mouawad

Assisted by Kristiaan Aercke
Vahid Behmardi



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in the Middle East

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Introduction to Discrimination and Tolerance in the Middle East

RAY JABRE MOUAWAD

Patterns of discrimination and tolerance in the Middle East have seldom been openly debated in the Middle East. On the one hand, the region is enjoying new leeway due to the emergence of Arab, Kurdish, Coptic and other Oriental Christian television programs that are broadcasted worldwide via satellite as well as increasing access to the internet. Yet on the other hand, Beirut remains one of the few Arab capitals where such debates can be held at the level of universities. Here, it is led by scholars personally devoted to their research, and without censorship or other governmental intervention. Furthermore, it is clear that the lack of open debates on identity, culture and history in the Middle East is inevitably leading the region to more alienation and violence.

It is under these circumstances that the idea of a colloquium on Discrimination and Tolerance in the Middle East was born. The Lebanese American University (LAU) and the Orient-Institute Beirut (OIB) launched the inter-disciplinary colloquium at the LAU on 7-9th May 2007; it aims to describe Middle Eastern societies in terms of tolerance or discrimination, in a Middle Eastern capital.

Such events aim at helping to fill the gap by bringing together international scholars in various fields such as law, literature, sociology, history, anthropology, psychology, media discourse, film studies, women's studies, business, and the fine arts, as well as NGO representatives, in order to stimulate local debate on these matters. The principal themes would include race and migration, religious (in-)tolerance, gender relations and the status of women in society, cultural differences or convergent traditions. The hereby proceedings of this colloquium tackle the majority of these themes, although many fields mentioned above require future sessions to be held in Beirut.

According to the conference's definition, the geographical boundaries of the Middle East extend from Turkey to Iran and down to Egypt, a territory perceived as being linked by a certain historical and cultural unity. Our

studies reach from the monotheistic Christian Byzantium and Zoroastrian Persia to the east and west of the Euphrates' river before the Arab conquest (635-642) to this day. It seemed to the organizers that the roots of behavior towards discrimination and tolerance in Middle Eastern societies could well be historically related to the spread of monotheistic religions, mainly Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Islam, at a time when they became closely associated with a centralized system of power and governance. In this regard, it can be argued that Byzantium or Sassanid Persia inherited patterns of behavior from Mesopotamia or Ancient Egypt. However, it is clear that both civilizations, Byzantium and Sassanid Persia, were in place on the eve of Islam, therefore on the eve of a new era in the Middle East, where societies began to be progressively molded by the new religion's expansion and political supremacy.

The meanings and implications of the two basic concepts of "tolerance" and "discrimination" were also addressed. For instance, what is tolerance? Is it simply absence of persecution, or positive acceptance of the other's difference? Furthermore, how can these two concepts be applied to periods, or societies, where they did not yet constitute a standard of behavior?

These questions underlie most of the situations of discrimination and/or tolerance which are described and analyzed in this book. Jay Gupta's first article focuses on a philosophical definition of the concept of tolerance and its relevance for Middle Eastern societies. Mahmoud Natout tries as well to tackle a re-definition of religion in the Middle East that would favor a different approach to "dialogue" and "tolerance". These two preliminary reflections are followed by a series of articles that research cases of discrimination or tolerance in Syria and Lebanon during the Ottoman era, with different approaches to the status of Christian minorities. Carsten Walbinder treats the perception of Islamic rule by Greek Orthodox through the writing of their patriarch Macarius Ibn al-Za'im (1647-1672). Hayat Bualuan analyzes general patterns of discrimination exerted against Christians in Bilād al-Shām in the course of the 18th century, particularly in such cities as Damascus or Acre. Ray Jabre Mouawad explores the settlement of Christian Maronites in a Shiite village of Mount Lebanon in the course of the 17th century, and the final expulsion of the Shiites from that same village, in the context of the Ottoman Empire's administrative apparatus. Souad Slim dedicates her chapter to the *jizyah*, a special tax to be paid by non-Muslims to an Islamic government, in Ottoman Mount Lebanon.

Other articles describe situations of tolerance and discrimination in more recent periods. Ibrahim El-Hussari analyzes the mutual perspective of the "Other" in Palestinian and Israeli contemporary literature. Mona Fayad treats several aspects of intolerance in Arab contemporary political

discourse, e.g. towards the Kurds, while Mahmoud Haddad describes the difficult transition of the Muslim community in Lebanon from their self-perception as part of the community of Muslim believers, the *ummah*, to being one out of many *millets* alongside with other religious groups in the Ottoman Empire, and the question of discrimination. Finally, Luma Balaa sheds light on the question of gender discrimination through the lenses of Egyptian modern literature focusing in particular on the novel by Nawal al-Saadawi, *Two Women in One*.

It would not be possible to end the presentation of this volume without homage to Dr. Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, who was present all along the debates of the colloquium, and who passed away on 5th July 2010. This well-known Egyptian scholar was himself an eloquent victim of intolerance, for having written many books on a new critical approach to the Qur'anic text, the issue of women in Islamic societies and mechanisms of power linked to religious discourse. He came to Beirut on several occasions, and in May 2007, the OIB and LAU hosted the colloquium on Discrimination and Tolerance in the Middle East, published thereafter in this volume. Dr. Abu Zayd gave a lecture entitled "Roots of intolerance in religious discourse". We shall remember his humanist approach to all the issues raised during the colloquium, and his capacity to listen to the other, which is the first condition for tolerance.



Is Tolerance Rational?

JAY A. GUPTA

I.

I wish to argue here that any genuine commitment to tolerance will require us to replace talk of the *value* of tolerance with talk of the rational *virtue* of tolerance. To speak of a commitment to the *value* of tolerance is actually a profoundly non-committal way of speaking, whereas to speak of commitment to the *virtue* of tolerance implies a rationally defensible standpoint that does not merely state *that* tolerance *is* valued, but implicitly attempts to indicate to all good faith interlocutors *why* it *ought* to be valued, and why conversely intolerance *ought* to be condemned. In addition, whereas on some occasions our general habit of speaking in terms of “values” is merely non-committal, on others it has an implicitly divisive, exclusivist tendency. I will trace our general habit of speaking in terms of values to the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, and recommend ways in which we can change this habit. I will also show how the divisive tendency of values rhetoric is evident in the thinking of Samuel Huntington, who predicts large scale clashes between cultural value systems in his book *The Clash of Civilizations*. I will close with an analysis of the notorious Salman Rushdie affair, and briefly comment on the dispute over Muslims wearing headscarves in French public schools, and the Danish cartoon controversy.

A broadly liberal, tolerant attitude towards the values, beliefs, and practices of members of different groups, both religious and cultural, is a mainstay of progressivist social thinking. Both the terms “multiculturalism” and “liberalism” capture different dimensions of this broad attitude; hence I will employ the term “multicultural liberalism” to refer to one important species of it. In some sense, the master value of multicultural liberalism is “tolerance”, proffered as a normative ideal.

However, the importance of tolerance is recognized far and wide beyond this multicultural liberalist perspective. It is important to distinguish the multicultural liberalist standpoint, which tends to be a Western

phenomenon, from other standpoints that also value tolerance; these latter can have various intellectual and cultural grounds. For example, more traditionalist perspectives also value tolerance, and tend to diagnose cultural conflict as rooted in an absence of it. I think that Lebanese society provides a case in point.

The Lebanese value tolerance. When social and political tensions escalate and erupt into clashes, there is the widespread sense that it is partly due to a lack of tolerance, and a failure in some or all of the communities in question to recognize the importance of a commitment to tolerance. Perhaps it will be surprising for the outsider to hear that Lebanon is a society that values tolerance, but such a proposal would hardly surprise the Lebanese themselves. Lebanon is a richly heterogeneous nation, with great linguistic, cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity. Such diversity has, especially after independence, generated a significant level of tension that can unpredictably explode into violence. However, the popular media's emphasis of this fact overlooks the seemingly congenital disposition of the Lebanese to defuse tensions as they arise. I believe, for example, that it is justifiable to attribute a deep cultural meaning to a word like the Arabic "ma'lesh",¹ which one hears in Lebanon almost with the same frequency as "marhaba" ("hello") or "shukran" ("thank you"). "Ma'lesh" is an untranslatable combination of apology, reassurance and pacification ("It's okay"), and conciliatory indifference ("It doesn't matter"). It takes a foreigner (like me) a while to adjust to such nuances, but once perceived, the general function of the word becomes unmistakable. The word arguably embeds a meaningful cultural acknowledgement of the social necessity of tolerance in everyday interactions and transactions in a Lebanese civil society that is divided along complex religious and ethnic lines. The different religious and ethnic groups of Lebanon are committed to deeply distinct normative perspectives, but they are implicitly equally committed, perhaps because of that very fact, to a general attitude of tolerance. However, even while acknowledging the value placed on tolerance, it would be incorrect to characterize Lebanon as a "multicultural liberalist" society, as should be evident from the following analysis.

Multicultural liberalism is not only defined by a commitment to the "value of tolerance"; it is defined by another quite different element, which ultimately renders its standpoint incoherent. It is committed to two dogmas that appear to imply each other, yet which are also in some cases inconsistent. The first dogma asserts that, if not in such blunt terms, "tolerance is

¹ This point perhaps extends to the entire Arab world, which to an even greater degree than Lebanon is mistakenly perceived to be culturally homogeneous by Westerners.

good". Thus the phrase "value of tolerance": the multicultural liberal has a respect for and a commitment to the value of tolerance, which means that she believes that it is good to accept or allow for beliefs, practices, and values that may not accord with her own. The second dogma, which indeed seems implied by the first, demands skepticism concerning the possibility of criticism of alternative cultural beliefs, practices, or values. It is related to a general moral or cultural relativism that in its more robust form asserts that there is no rational way to adjudicate the relative worth of values. Thus the multiculturalist will typically assume a posture of skeptical reserve towards, or straightforwardly reject the general idea that one set of cultural values and practices can be condemned or criticized from a standpoint that is external to those values and practices.

These two dogmas appear to imply one another, yet in important instances they are inconsistent. The claim that tolerance is good implies the claim that intolerance is bad. One might think of this as the logically minimal way in which tolerance, despite its basic meaning to "accept" or "allow", prohibits at least one thing, and that is intolerance. However, this implication of the first dogma can run afoul of the second, the imperative that one ought to suspend judgment concerning the beliefs, practices, and values of cultures or sects not one's own. What if one believes that intolerance is bad, and one is also confronted with beliefs, practices, and values that exhibit intolerance? It would be inconsistent to suspend judgment concerning them. But to condemn is to presumably be no longer tolerant. This state of affairs seems to arise because suspending judgment implicitly issues from a demand made by the value of tolerance itself; anyone who believes that tolerance is good, the first dogma, seems implicitly committed to the second, which commands the suspension of judgment, particularly judgments that condemn the beliefs, practices, and values of other cultural standpoints. So the two dogmas are tightly implicated, yet in important instances apparently inconsistent.

Is the very idea of tolerance incoherent? Certainly, there is occasion to question the rationality of any idea that has self-refuting characteristics. But I wish to argue that it is the way that tolerance is conceived from the standpoint of multicultural liberalism that leads to the paradox, and not any defect in the idea of tolerance itself. Indeed, I believe that tolerance should be regarded as eminently rational, and that the rationality of tolerance is the substantive, normative basis for a commitment to it. To say that something is "rational" or "irrational" is to do more than pay an empty compliment or dispense a vacuous term of abuse. Theorists such as Jürgen Habermas and others have concretely demonstrated that rationality has a social, discursive,

and normative significance, and reflects a distinctive human inclination and capacity to engage in discourse with other members of our species that is geared towards mutual understanding, coordination, and agreement.² In this sense, tolerance must be regarded as the rational virtue par excellence, since it implies an attitude that effectively provides the very conditions for engaging in such discourse: a good faith willingness to enter into dialogue. However, for reasons that should become apparent shortly, it is precisely the rational basis of tolerance that the standpoint of multicultural liberalism is not presently prepared to endorse.

I mentioned above that while it would be right to think of the Lebanese as a people who value tolerance, and who do so against a backdrop of great ethnic and cultural diversity, it would be incorrect to think of them as multicultural liberals. That is because in general there is neither an implicit nor explicit commitment to the second dogma outlined above, which is essentially the standpoint of cultural relativism.³ Cultural relativism has developed into a primarily Western cultural phenomenon. It is in the West that some form of cultural relativism has seemed to be a requirement of tolerance itself, perhaps because of the long history of colonialist aggression by Western nations, and the subsequently widespread desire to permanently renounce such attitudes and practices. Particularly, any invocation of “reason” is greeted with systematic skepticism, since reason has been implicated in some of the worst colonialist abuses. Exploitation, mass murder, and theft have often been accompanied by some form of rational justification or program of “enlightenment”.⁴ Thus it can appear intellectually irresponsible to speak of the rationality even of tolerance, since the normative meaning of “rationality” is deeply suspect. However, as I wish to make plain, the alternatives for normative discourse are far worse. The main such alternative, which has acquired astonishing cultural currency, is what I will term “values discourse”.

² This notion is captured in Habermas’ theory of reason as communicative action, which he has developed throughout his career. For a useful adumbration, see Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence, Cambridge: MIT Press 1990, Lecture XI.

³ James and Stuart Rachels provide a marvelous introduction to and critique of cultural relativism in “The Challenge of Cultural Relativism”, Chapter Two of *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 6th ed., New York: McGraw Hill 2010.

⁴ Among the numerous examples in European history over the last 300 years is the case of King Leopold II of Belgium, who appeared to sincerely believe that he was bringing “civilization” to the 19th Century “Belgian Congo”, a process that translated into the enslavement and murder of the indigenous population, and the theft of their natural resources. Joseph Conrad’s account of this state of affairs in *Heart of Darkness* remains the definitive narrative of all “dialectics of enlightenment”.

The standpoint of multicultural liberalism rests strongly upon the idea of “values” and values discourse. Values discourse reflects a prominent myth of the modern age, active in popular, media, and academic culture. The idea is that you have your values and I have mine; they have their values and we have ours. Like perceptions, concepts, and memories, values are among the items that make up our overall psychic inventory, and lack any further grounding or justification. Perhaps they come from culture, perhaps tradition, perhaps from “personal growth”; but regardless of their provenance, there is a sense in which they are immediately given, as the bedrock for any further type of judgment. We have inherited this idea from Nietzsche via Weber, and it has since become a central dogma of the Humanities and Social Sciences, and trickled down to the popular and media culture, where it is ubiquitously in use. It is worth briefly rehearsing here how Nietzsche deliberately transferred “values” from the normative sphere, where values are understood to be susceptible to criticism and revision, to the descriptive sphere, where values are understood to constitute a kind of psychological bedrock.

II.

For Nietzsche, the innovator⁵ of values discourse, the claims of reason and the morality it supports are unmasked as arbitrarily grounded in brute value preferences (themselves grounded in “will”), which are reflected in the attitudes and traditions of the kinds of people who possess them: healthy/unhealthy, creative/uncreative, charismatic/uncharismatic, powerful/weak, master/slave—these become the relevant dyads of social analysis and cultural criticism, replacing the normative conceptions of right and wrong, true and false. These latter are understood to be the rhetoric of a reason that hypocritically disguises its own hegemonic tendencies, its own will to power; rationality becomes mere rationalization in the service of a particular value scheme. Values become the final units of analysis⁶ through which it is possible to unmask the arbitrary foundations of any normative claim.

⁵ More precisely: Nietzsche is the most influential exponent of a usage originating with the 19th century Neo-Kantians.

⁶ From a more metaphysical vantage, it is correct to say that for Nietzsche values themselves are grounded in “will”; but the will is psychologically indeterminate until it is converted into values. This interesting juncture between metaphysics and psychology, explored in other areas of Nietzsche’s work, falls beyond the scope of this essay. See for example the posthumously published *Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, New York: Random House 1967. See particularly the section entitled “Theory of the Will to Power and Values”.

Nietzsche undertakes this unmasking using a method he calls “genealogy”.⁷ For any normative claim regarding right or wrong, just or unjust, one must look past what the content of the claim is to discern who is making the claim,⁸ with an eye towards discovering the type of values in play. The idea is to discredit the content of a normative claim by tracing it back to a corrupt value standpoint. Nietzsche expects that the value standpoint of those who are physically or psychologically weaker is going to ground a very different conception of what is good or just than that of the stronger. He points to the values of ancient aristocracy cultures, for example Athens and pre-Christian Rome, as reflecting the strong type of “master” values – proud, self-affirming, confident, unabashedly aggressive – and therefore also a conception of justice that intrinsically rewards the stronger and better endowed. He contrasts the norms of these civilizations with the norms of “Judeo-Christian” civilizations, grounded in values of humility, self-sacrifice, self-limitation, and self-denial. Prior to their evolution as the “core values” of these civilizations, these “slave” values are first seen to be literally the values of slaves, groups of people interested in protecting themselves against those with a seemingly limitless power over them. Their conception of justice will therefore include a strong emphasis on the limitation of power. These types of people will have very different interests than those who potentially and actually oppress them; but it is in the nature of normative claims to disguise these differences.

Normative claims carry an implicit universalistic tendency, as captured in the phrase “justice for all”. But what happens when the weaker are able to persuade the stronger based on universalistic normative considerations of justice to limit their power? It may appear that everyone’s interests are served, but for Nietzsche it is really only the weaker party’s interests that are served. This has grave culture-wide significance since it is the slave’s values – self-protective, impoverished, distressed, degenerate – that ground the culture’s normative ideals, and not the “master’s” values, which reflect “plenitude, force, will of life...courage, certainty, future”.⁹

It is based on these kinds of considerations that Nietzsche wishes to expose the futility and retrograde character of normative discourse. Only relative equals with the same kinds of values can productively engage one another. Discourse between groups with fundamentally different

⁷ See Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York: Vintage Books 1967.

⁸ Far from ‘*ad hominem*’ argumentation constituting a fallacy, for Nietzsche it is an important aspect of the proposed *method*.

⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 17.

value standpoints can only reduce to a strategic jockeying for power, what Habermas calls “strategic action”. It was worth rehearsing here Nietzsche’s radical views not only because he is the progenitor of what I have called “values discourse”, but also because his view brings into stark relief what is at stake in the move to ground normative discourse in values discourse: values discourse has a kind of built-in power to erode normative discussion and debate. The good faith assumption underlying normative discussion is that it can proceed along rational lines and that better or worse reasons can be given for normative claims. However, a moral universe that reduces in principle to value schemes ipso facto lacks the normative framework to negotiate between them. It is the traditional assumption of rationality that mediation is possible, that dialogue between potentially hostile groups can occur. However, from a Nietzschean standpoint the “game” of giving and asking for reasons itself becomes just one more value to be arbitrarily possessed or discarded. Further, “rationality” from a Nietzschean perspective is unmasked as belonging to the value scheme of the impotent. Interminable deliberation is in the interests of those who are unable to act, or who wish to forestall the actions of those who can. Reason merely becomes one of several forms of “strategic action”, a way for an individual or group of individuals to achieve pre-existing and incorrigible goals at the expense of another.

Nietzsche self-consciously reverses the philosophical power and priority of reason first articulated in antiquity by Plato and Aristotle. Reason on this sort of conception constitutes a comprehensive, organic normative framework where “goods” are organized and ranked. For example, justice in Plato’s conception is not merely one value amongst many. It is rather the highest virtue, embodied by those whose psyches are ruled by a rational principle. This arguably accords with most people’s intuitions about the importance and meaning of justice. But a consistent values perspective denies this. The genealogy of the value of justice for a thinker like Nietzsche, one of the few to have thought through the consequences of making values the principles of the human psyche, exhibits a variety of natural, psychological, and historical sources, none of which include a primordial human responsiveness to reason. The value of justice rather hails from the ways in which the stronger have controlled the weaker in order to keep the destructive forces of resentment at bay, or considered from a different value standpoint, the way the weaker, who require norms of justice for their brute survival, have duped the stronger into entering perverse contracts to limit their natural power. The normative basis for talking about virtue and vice is eliminated in favor of a kind of survival of the fittest picture of stronger values knocking off weaker ones. Justice is merely a value, one among

many, and like reason itself takes a seat among every other arbitrary value, no better nor worse than any other in any rationally defensible sense.

III.

The so-called value of tolerance must meet a similar fate of being reduced to an unjustifiable, arbitrary attitude if it is held from the standpoint of a multicultural liberalism conceived in the terms of a values discourse rather than in those of a discourse of reason. As indicated earlier, it is the standpoint that is at issue, not tolerance itself; tolerance, like the historically evolved conception of justice, is arguably rational to the core. Its conceptual heritage lies in the work of Locke and Kant, and forms part of the rational basis of modern liberal democracies; as advocated by these thinkers, tolerance is not merely a value, but a rational good, which is what Aristotle and Plato called a virtue. By “rational basis”, I mean this: tolerance is a condition for dialogue. The capacity to allow for beliefs or proposals that may run against the grain of one’s expectations or preferences is a *sine qua non* for coming to any kind of agreement or understanding. Therefore, if rationality has a normative and social significance, the virtue of tolerance must play an important role in its realization.

Further, to speak of virtue in general indicates that genuine moral commitments can receive a defense within an implicitly or explicitly shared normative framework, which now in the modern world in principle extends to all of humanity. To speak of the virtue of tolerance in particular therefore implies that one can defend with reasons, as I briefly attempted in the foregoing, why the attitude of tolerance is a superior and worthwhile attitude; one can attempt to reveal the rational basis of one’s commitment to it. It is to not merely aver that tolerance is valued, but to attempt to provide an account of why it ought to be valued to those who may question its value.

But we now speak of the value of tolerance, not the virtue of tolerance. This is not to split hairs; it rather reveals our fundamental attitude towards our own presumably highest moral commitments. From the vantage of a multicultural liberalism that deploys a discourse of values, our moral commitments are just that, ours, and so as multicultural liberals we must allow ample space for competing values that are no more and no less defensible than our own. This is how the first dogma of multicultural liberalism, that “tolerance is good”, gives way to the second, “I may not judge the attitudes, practices, and values of others”. By contrast, the true logic of tolerance implies and indeed demands a condemnation of intolerance; it is not logically related to a terminal suspension of judgment concerning

the practices of others. This latter hails from a different source altogether: a commitment to values discourse. It is the dual commitment to tolerance and to values discourse that renders multicultural liberalism incoherent, not any defect in the concept of tolerance itself.

This is seen in the fact that a commitment to values discourse is not only consistent with the skeptical suspension of judgment concerning the values and practices of others, it is also consistent with markedly intolerant positions. The ugly, less discussed underbelly of moral relativism is that it is consistent with an irrational endorsement of one's own values at the expense of others', a position that Nietzsche was quite comfortable with, but one that the multicultural liberal is bound to reject. Samuel Huntington for example does not shy away from this outcome. In the influential article "A Clash of Civilizations?", later expanded into a book, he prophesies that because of an incommensurability of values between civilizations, they are poised to clash. He diagnoses the ill will between sectors of the Western and Islamic worlds as fundamentally reflecting a clash of beliefs and values, and indicates that it is time for the West to close ranks. Although he claims "not to advocate the desirability of conflicts between civilizations", and to be merely setting forth "descriptive hypotheses as to what the future may be like", in the next breath he says, "If these are plausible hypotheses, however, it is necessary to consider their implications for Western policy".¹⁰ A set of downright xenophobic recommendations follow, all of which follow from the basic premise of values incommensurability between civilizations. Here are three indicative ones: "to promote greater cooperation and unity within its [the West's] own civilization; to incorporate into the West societies in Eastern Europe and Latin America whose cultures are close to those of the West [...]; to limit the expansion of the military strength of Confucian and Islamic states".¹¹ These are perfectly reasonable recommendations given Huntington's premises. Dialogue is only possible between those with shared values, and an attitude of implicit or explicit hostility must be maintained in relation to alien civilizations with alien values at their core. Inter-civilizational "dialogue" can only have a strategic function, of persuading the implicitly hostile camp that there is a coincidence of interests on any given issue, while substantively working only to advance one's own interests. That is what values discourse does, it thins down all normative considerations into the narrow concerns of "strategic action": so-called "dialogue" is reduced to a means for the pursuit of incorrigible, uncriticizable, pre-existing interests.

¹⁰ Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?", *Foreign Affairs* 73/3 (1993), 48.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

It is noteworthy that the numerous critics of Huntington focus on his dubious concept of ‘civilizations’, or the idea that there are sharp borders between them, or that people have civilizational identities at all, and so on.¹² That is to criticize Huntington for overestimating value incommensurability between “civilizations”, not to criticize him for engaging in values discourse itself. These critics do not attack the methodological place the notion of “values” has in his thinking. That is because values discourse is taken uncritically for granted. It remains unrecognized that to speak of values in this foundationalist manner disguises a *petitio principii*: the discourse proceeds from premises to conclusions of incommensurability. Thinkers like Nietzsche and Huntington may be alarming, but they are quite consistent.

IV.

It seems appropriate now to consider contemporary cases where a lack of clarity about the nature of one’s normative commitments exacts a heavy toll. The paradigm case for head-spinning incoherence among a liberal intelligentsia presumably committed to tolerance remains the Salman Rushdie affair.¹³ As is well known, after the fatwā commanding faithful Muslims to kill Rushdie was declared by Ayatollah Khomeini, a spate of articles appeared from Western academics and journalists that berated Rushdie for essentially bringing the fatwā upon himself. Some even expressed a malicious desire to see the fatwā carried out. Few in the immediate aftermath condemned the fact that the leader of a foreign state commanded his followers to commit murder. This remarkable reaction deserves careful analysis.

To begin with, if it were the case that these commentators were actually committed to the virtue of tolerance, then like any virtue, they would be committed to condemning its absence as vicious. To use some classical examples, a commitment to the virtue of justice implies a condemnation of the vice of injustice, a commitment to the virtue of wisdom implies a condemnation of the vice of ignorance, a commitment to the virtue of courage implies a condemnation of the vice of cowardice, and so on. The distinctively modern virtue of tolerance is no exception; a genuine commitment to it must imply a condemnation of intolerance as vicious, and I can think

¹² A notable example of this critical tendency is found in an article by Edward Said, “The Clash of Ignorance”, published in *The Nation*, October 22, 2001, 11-13.

¹³ A good, if somewhat polemical discussion of this episode may be found in Christopher Hitchens, *God is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, New York: Twelve 2007. See also Ibn Warraq’s introduction and Salman Rushdie’s subsequent address to the Center of Inquiry at [URL] <http://www.frontpagemag.com/Articles/ReadArticle.asp?ID=25464> (last checked on July 6, 2010).

of no better example of vicious intolerance than a case where a religious leader puts a price on someone's head for blasphemy. However, a condemnation of this act was largely absent.

Instead, it was implicitly Rushdie's intolerance that was condemned. By publishing *The Satanic Verses*, he was allegedly not expressing the requisite sensitivity to the feelings of Muslims. On this logic, hurting someone's feelings presumably justifies a homicidal reaction. But here the multicultural liberalists' cards are on the table. Their reaction far from expressing a commitment to the virtue of tolerance betrays contempt for it. Instead, their master allegiance to what I have called the second dogma becomes visible: to exercise a total and thoroughgoing skepticism when it comes to the beliefs, practices, and values of the Other, even if these beliefs and practices condone cold-blooded murder. This attitude is arguably an artifact of a thinking that has been determined by values discourse: in a world of value systems, none with any greater or lesser justification than any other, the virtue of tolerance is demoted to being an indefensible value, and thus any putative commitment to it is easily overtaken by the categorical imperative to suspend judgment on the actions of those who are regarded as inhabiting alien value systems.

The implicit condescension of such an attitude is appalling. First, it treats putative Otherness as a kind of holy cow: the Other is inscrutable, incomprehensible; thus we must suspend judgment on its beliefs and actions. This sort of attitude ought to be regarded as a symptom of intellectual laziness and even contempt, rather than as a sign of respect, tolerance, or sound intellectual procedure. Second, by treating the Other with this alleged respect, the multicultural liberalist implicitly excludes the Other from her own moral scheme, one that for example values tolerance and proscribes cold-blooded murder. That is precisely how Khomeini escaped criticism from intellectual circles. The implication is that we cannot expect these Others to abide by our norms, which after all, merely reflect our values. But this ruse is paper-thin. Despite an intellectual commitment to values relativity, it is also believed that unjustifiable homicide is bad, a judgment that emphatically includes religious edicts that command it, and it is believed that this judgment does not merely reflect a culturally contingent set of values. But the intellectual commitment to a relativistic values discourse strains those who adopt it towards a posture of extreme hypocrisy, and also contempt for the group that is allegedly being respected. They are no longer regarded as rational interlocutors who can be fruitfully engaged in a potential dialogue. Instead, someone like Khomeini is uncritically accepted as representing the views of a people who presumably cannot be understood or related to in principle.

What I called the ugly underbelly of the moral relativism implied in values discourse is visible in more recent affairs pertaining to relations between the West and the Islamic world. Both the headscarves debate in France and the Danish cartoon controversy were couched strongly in terms of values discourse. Concerning the former, it was widely observed in editorials that the so-called “core secular values” of the republic were being threatened by young Muslim women who attended school in headscarves, and who by implication possessed alien values; this led to a government ban. Apparently the other “core values” of liberty, fraternity, and equality took a back seat; what happened to the liberty to peacefully practice one’s religion? Likewise, the Danish cartoon controversy was couched entirely in terms of the “Western value” of free speech, again set in contrast to the allegedly alien values of the Islamic world. In reality, Muslim reaction to the cartoons published by the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* represents a psychologically complex phenomenon, comparable for example to the current protests in the U.S.A. against building a “mosque”¹⁴ near Ground Zero. In neither case do we witness anything that can be responsibly construed as a “conflict of values”; however values discourse formulaically reduces such phenomena to the simplest of terms and simulates an understanding of them.

In these examples, rational mediation is rhetorically forestalled in principle. The “debate” is set up like the pieces in a game of chess, the paradigmatic game of “strategic action”; in addition to reflecting an arrangement of intrinsic hostility, the “moves” in the debate are set in advance to play out this hostility. Given the premise of an impassable gulf in values, no other outcome is conceivable.

These examples demonstrate that values discourse has the effect of seriously distorting public debate. In its worst, most divisive form it, to again use Huntington’s phrase, invites a closing of ranks by all parties. Modern secularists become vehement and Muslims become defensive. That is because any potentially richer normative dimension to debate has been thinned down to the assumptions of strategic action. Huntington’s thesis concerning a clash of civilizations is in a sense trivially true almost to the point of tautology: if one starts from the premise of values incommensurability, and the parties in question genuinely value what they value, the inevitable outcome just is a clash. Absent rich rational-normative assumptions, so-called debate simply becomes a theater for various parties to announce the next conflagration. Here the virtue of tolerance simply drops out as irrelevant.

¹⁴ What is in fact being constructed is a Muslim Community Center.

To conclude, values discourse is widely used as a kind of normative discourse, but it is one that oscillates between postures of weak moral commitment and exclusivist phobia. It arguably has evolved from Nietzsche's radical critique of normative ethics, which in principle forbids the rational defense of moral prescriptions. Hence, those who are inclined to defend the "value of tolerance" will have their intentions undermined, for values discourse in general is tied to an entire conceptual machinery constructed according to relativist principles. Would-be moral commitments are then either rendered impotent or pushed into the opposite direction of brute assertion. This thins out the sphere of normative communication into a theater of strategic action, a scene of incommensurable and potentially antagonistic value schemes. To exit the dialectical swing from moral impotence to brute assertion, moral language must be invested with rational assumptions concerning how moral claims can be introduced for consideration and assessment by all concerned parties. Many current discourses about "Islam and the West" appear to have implicitly rejected these kinds of rational assumptions in favor of one or another form of relativistic values discourse. Communication will be forestalled or severely distorted unless it can proceed in a more robust normative language. I have suggested that the classical language of virtues conforms to this description, but there may be other ways by which modern normative discourse may be enhanced and revitalized.



A Rare Revelation: An Arab Christian of the 17th Century on the Influence Islam exercised on the Development of his Community over the Course of Time*

CARSTEN WALBINER

The literary reflections of their dealings with Islam assumed two forms amongst the Eastern Christians living under Muslim dominion. On the one hand, a polemical and apologetic literature appeared which aimed at a refutation of the religious positions of the other side and a strengthening of the Christians' own belief.¹ On the other hand, concrete events in the daily coexistence with Muslims found their expression in historical writings,² and later on also in letters sent to European addressees, often pleading for support in specific situations of hardship.³ As far as I know, no comprehensive analysis of the character of Muslim treatment of non-Muslims and its effects on the identity, culture and history of these communities was written in pre-modern times.

This means that we do not know much about how non-Muslims really perceived the rule of Islam during the different periods of history and how they measured its effects on themselves. Nevertheless, there exist – in both East and West – plenty of very clearly articulated opinions on the character of Christian-Muslim coexistence over the course of time.

* I am most grateful to Dr. Hilary Kilpatrick of Lausanne for her valuable advice with regard to the language and contents of this paper.

¹ For an introduction into the polemic and apologetic writings in Arabic see the still valuable classic *Polemische und apologetische Literatur in arabischer Sprache* by Moritz Steinschneider (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung 1966 [reprint of the edition Leipzig 1877] and the relevant entries in Georg Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, 5 vols., Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana 1944-1953, as well as Joseph Nasrallah, *Histoire du mouvement littéraire dans l'Eglise Melchite du Ve au XXe siècle*, 5 vols., Louvain: Editions Peeters 1979-1989 and 1 vol., Damascus: Editions de l'Institut Français de Damas 1996.

² On Eastern Christian historiography under Islam, mainly in Arabic, see the concerning passages in Graf, *Geschichte* and Nasrallah, *Histoire*.

³ For some examples see Antoine Rabbath, *Documents inédits pour servir à l'histoire du Christianisme en Orient (XVI-XIX siècle)*, vol. 1, Paris: A. Picard et Fils, Leipzig: Otto Harrassovitz, London: Luzac et Co. 1905.

In contemporary Melkite Greek Orthodox or, to use the self-designation of this community, Rūm Orthodox historiography, tensions between Muslims and Christians as well as the undeniable oppression and persecution Christians had to suffer at Muslim hands are seen as exceptional. Furthermore, the ethnic factor is given special importance, as many Orthodox historians believe that problems only occurred with non-Arab Muslim rulers, while in the period of the so called “Arab dynasties” the relations between Christians and Muslims were marked by firm cooperation.⁴ Bishop George Khudr, one of the most influential Arab Orthodox intellectuals, in his writings advocates the notion of an especially close relation of his Church with Islam based on a common origin and a shared history.⁵ For Khudr and many others the Orthodox Church of Antioch is traditionally the “Arab Church” par excellence.⁶

However, this view is the result of historical developments and political considerations⁷ and should not be taken as a sign of continuity in the history of Orthodox reflection on Islam. This can be demonstrated by examining a text from the 17th century which partly deals with the changes Muslim rule brought to the Orthodox or, in a wider perspective, to the Christians as a whole in the Near East. The little treatise gives a rare if not unique insight into the perception of Muslim rule and its effects on non-Muslims in pre-modern times. Its author is the Aleppo-born Macarius Ibn al-Za‘īm, who was the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch from 1647 to 1672. He was not only the most eminent leader of his community in the 17th century but

⁴ Regina Panzer, *Identität und Geschichtsbewußtsein. Griechisch-orthodoxe Christen im Vorderen Orient zwischen Byzanz und Arabertum*, Hamburg: LIT Verlag 1998, 117.

⁵ See for example Jūrj Khuḍr, “Nafas Anṭākiyah fī tadayyuniḥā”, in: *Tārīkh kanīsat Anṭākiyah li-l-Rūm al-urthūdhuks: Ayya khuṣūṣīyah?*, The University of Balamand, ed., al-Balamand/Lebanon: Manshūrāt Jāmi‘at al-Balamand 1999, 97-107, here 106-107.

⁶ On recent positions of the Orthodox Church of Antioch, mainly by its Patriarch Ignatius IV Hazīm and Bishop Khuḍr, see As‘ad Qaṭṭān, *Anṭākiyah al-urthūdhuksiyyah fikran wa-ḥayātan*, al-Balamand/Lebanon: Manshūrāt Jāmi‘at al-Balamand 2006, 131-132; for a layman’s voice see Īlī Adīb Sālīm, “al-Kanīсах wa-l-taḥaddīyah al-mu‘āṣirah”, in: *Tārīkh kanīsat Anṭākiyah*, 353-358, here 356.

⁷ On the genesis of this position, partly as a result of anti-Greek attitudes, see Derek Hopwood, *The Russian presence in Syria and Palestine 1843-1914. Church and Politics in the Near East*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1969, 27-28, 177, and Ṭāriq Mitrī, “al-Masīḥīyyūn al-sharqīyyūn wa-l-Islām: Qirā‘ah fī tāriḥ al-afkār wa-l-mashā‘ir wa-l-mawāqif”, in: idem, *Suṭūr mustaqīmah bi-aḥruf muta‘arrījah ‘an al-masīḥīyyīn al-sharqīyyīn wa-l-‘alāqāt bayn al-masīḥīyyīn wa-l-muslimīn*, Beirut: Manshūrāt Jāmi‘at al-Balamand and Dār al-Nahār 2007, 29-75, here 56.

also the most prolific Arab Orthodox writer of his time.⁸ Although Macarius showed marked interest in historical matters,⁹ mainly concerning his own church and religion, Islam is not recognised in his writings as a factor that exercised a considerable influence on the development of the Orthodox community. In this regard, the text treated here represents an exception to this rule. In his main historical work, a history of the patriarchs of Antioch from the Apostle Peter until his own times, Islam is only mentioned marginally although for most of the previous 1000 years the Orthodox had been living under Muslim rule. Only en passant does Macarius tell of the changes of Muslim dynasties, and rarely does he give examples of Christian persecution by Muslims.¹⁰ However, these remarks are of such a minor character that it is not possible to gain an impression of Muslim-Christian relations through the course of centuries by examining this work.

There is no doubt that Macarius was not happy with the situation of his community under Ottoman Muslim rule, as can be concluded for example from a letter he sent to the King of France in 1663 in which he says: “We want to inform you of the situation of the Christians, Your brothers, who are in these [Eastern] lands in enormous distress which is even greater than in the old times so that they have been forced by their great poverty to sell their children.”¹¹ But Macarius remains very vague concerning the reasons

⁸ On the life and work of Macarius see Graf, *Geschichte*, vol. 3 (1949), 94-110; Nasrallah, *Histoire*, vol. IV/1 (1979), 87-127; Carsten-Michael Walbiner, *Die Mitteilungen des griechisch-orthodoxen Patriarchen Makarius Ibn az-Zaʿīm von Antiochia (1647-1672) über Georgien nach dem arabischen Autograph von St. Petersburg*, Ph.D. thesis, Leipzig 1995 (microfiche edition), 8-38.

⁹ On Macarius as a historian see Joseph Nasrallah, “L’Œuvre historique du patriarche d’Antioche Macaire III Zaʿīm”, *Bulletin d’Etudes Orientales* 25 (1972), 191-202; Carsten-Michael Walbiner, “Makarius Ibn az-Zaʿīm als Historiker: Anliegen - Arbeitsweise - Ergebnisse”, in: *Annäherung an das Fremde. XXVI. Deutscher Orientalistentag vom 25. bis 29.9. 1995 in Leipzig*, Holger Preissler, Heidi Stein (eds.), Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag 1998, 155-163, and idem, “Macarius Ibn al-Zaʿīm and the Beginnings of an Orthodox Church Historiography in Bilād al-Shām”, in the University of Balamand (ed.), *Le Rôle des Historiens Orthodoxes dans l’Historiographie*, (Actes du colloque 11-14 mars 2007), al-Balamand/Lebanon: Manshūrāt Jāmiʿat al-Balamand, n. y [2010], 11-28.

¹⁰ See Macarius Ibn al-Zaʿīm, “Asāmī baʿārikat Anṭākiyah min Buṭrus al-rasūl ilā al-ān”, in: idem, *Kitāb majmūʿ yashtamil ʿalā akhbār wa-maʿānī kathīrah* (= Ms. St. Petersburg, Institute for Oriental Studies, B 1227), 158-162, 176 with an obvious focus on the first three centuries of Muslim rule. However, from a remark at the end of this treatise it becomes clear that Macarius also regarded the later periods of the Middle Ages as marked by “a multitude of misfortunes, mishaps, disasters, sadness and persecution” for the Melkite Christians (ibid., 190).

¹¹ Anṭūn Rabbāt, “al-Āthār al-sharqīyyah fī makātīb Bārīs”, *al-Mashriq* 6 (1903), 501; see also Nawūfiṭus Idlibī, *Asāqifat al-Rūm al-Malikiyyīn bi-Ḥalab fī l-ʿaṣr al-ḥadīth*, Aleppo: Maṭbaʿat al-Iḥsān 1983, 89.

for these sad circumstances and does not blame any specific party for them. Furthermore, one has to be cautious about such statements which aimed at arousing compassion and gaining material and political support. Hence they should not be taken as the sole evidence for the perception of Muslim rule by Oriental Christians.

Fortunately Macarius left a more reflective and comprehensive treatment of this subject. It is part of a miscellany, a collection of treatises typical for the literary and – if I may say so – scholarly activities of its author. The book called *Kitāb al-Naḥlah* (The Book of the Bee) consists of material Macarius had compiled from many different sources that were mainly written in Greek or in Arabic, but also orally transmitted in Georgian.¹² The entries vary in length and quality; beside very short remarks of a few lines there are longer and more elaborate tracts. Macarius composed “The Book of the Bee” in 1666 when travelling from Georgia to Russia.¹³ The work contains an untitled treatise which in some copies forms the foreword, but in another manuscript is placed as an epilogue (*khātimah*).¹⁴ But as it has no direct link with the contents of the rest of the book – with the exception of some short remarks on Macarius’ motives for writing the work – it can be regarded as a separate tract. In it Macarius looks back on the genesis of the linguistic situation of his community, an important factor for the definition of a person’s or a group’s identity. Macarius wants to inform his readers

about some strange facts the origin of which is probably unknown to them. Namely, that in old times in [the] great [City of God] Antioch, in Damascus, Tripoli and the lands pertaining to it, in Aleppo and the regions bordering on it and [generally] in the whole of our country, as well as in Jerusalem and its places up to the regions of Egypt and from Antioch up to the whole land of Karaman, the Greek and Romaic [= Byzantine] (*al-yūnānī wa-l-rūmī*) language was spoken.¹⁵

¹² On this work see Graf, *Geschichte*, vol. 3 (1949), 97-99; Nasrallah, *Histoire*, vol. IV/1 (1979), 90-91; Juliette Rassi-Rihani, “Sources arabes du «Livre de l’Abeille» (Kitāb al-Naḥlah) de Makāriyūs Ibn al-Za‘īm”, *Parole de l’Orient* 21 (1996), 215-244.

¹³ This becomes obvious from two colophons in the autograph of the “Book of the Bee” (= Ms. Homs, Greek Orthodox Metropolitanate, no. 28, fols. 37b, 50a)

¹⁴ This treatise has been published by Ḥabīb al-Zayyāt in his *Khazā’in al-kutub fī Dimashq wa-ḍawāḥihā*, Damascus: Maṭābi‘ Alif Bā’ - al-Adīb (= reprint of edition Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Ma‘ārif 1902), 144-151, based on a manuscript he has come across in the village of ‘Arabīn in the Damascus district (ibid., 140, n. 1). Y. al-Ḥaddād published a slightly shortened version of al-Zayyāt’s edition in *al-Masarrah* (“Qīṣṣat al-masīḥiyyah fī l-bilād al-‘arabiyyah min «Kitāb al-Naḥlah» li-l-baṭṭriyark Makāriyūs al-Ḥalabī”, [60] 1974, 514-521).

¹⁵ al-Zayyāt, *Khazā’in al-kutub*, 144.

Macarius attributes this situation to the rulers from Alexander the Great to Heraclius who ruled over the East, because “the language of all of them was Greek and Romaic. And therefore the Greek and Romaic language was disseminated in the greater part of the inhabited world, mainly in our lands [...], because the subjects speak the language of their kings.”¹⁶ Yet in the countryside, Macarius continues, for long periods of the time the Syriac language, which is still spoken in a few villages, dominated. Furthermore, a group of Armenians belonged to the patriarchate of Antioch, and in the formerly very populous diocese of Bosra or Ḥawrān people who spoke Arabic had been living since ancient times.¹⁷ “But it was despised,” he says, “and only a few [people] used to read it. Especially in the days of the Christian kings one used to read Greek and Syriac.”¹⁸ Macarius then relates in some detail the Christianisation of Arab tribes in pre-Islamic times including Christian presence in Mecca and Medina.¹⁹

Although he does not explicitly mention the appearance of Islam, it becomes obvious that Macarius regarded this event and the subsequent Muslim conquests as a radical turning point in history with far-reaching effects on the Christians of the Near East. I would like to quote at length what Macarius has to say on this subject, as it represents an extraordinary, and to my knowledge even unique, example for how a pre-modern Oriental Christian assessed the influence Islam exercised on the linguistic and concomitant intellectual development of his own community.

Thereafter God allowed the destruction of the royal rule of the Christians. He gave another tribe (*qabilah ghayruhum*) the absolute power over them, [a tribe] which punished them and ruled over them. Their glory and honour were destroyed and trials suddenly befell them. This happened because of [certain] things which [only] God knows – be it because of their arrogance and boasting or the sins [which they committed] against each other and their evil deeds; or because He wanted to try them, test their patience and [capacity for] suffering or doom them.

This is what happened to the Christians. The others (*al-ghayr*) defeated them, humiliated them and demanded they give up their faith. Those who resisted were killed. And many preferred death and martyrdom and died as martyrs. The accursed Jews used to incite the rulers (*al-ḥukkām*) [to actions against the Christians] and said to them: ‘We know the science of the stars.’²⁰ If you humiliate the servants of the cross you will have a

¹⁶ Ibid., 144-145.

¹⁷ Ibid., 145.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 146-148.

²⁰ I. e. the forecast of the future from the constellation of the stars (astrology).

long life.’ Many kings (*mulūk*) used to believe their words and committed many vile deeds against the Christians. Then they [the Jews] used to tell them that they should order the Christians to bring out the holy icons from the churches and burn them together with the crucifixes. Or they said to them: ‘Don’t ring the bells or raise your voices in prayer in the churches and don’t show your [religious] books in the streets. And men and women are not to wear expensive clothes.’ Some of these kings gave the Christians who were living in the remote districts of Egypt, in the lands of the barbarians, two orders: to destroy either their churches or their schools. And the ignorant people chose the destruction of their libraries and schools and gave up the instruction of their children. After a short while their bishops and priests died and they remained dumb, knowing neither their God nor their religion.

And this²¹ king (*malik*) had the Christian inhabitants of Damascus and its neighbourhood come before him and ordered them as the above mentioned barbarians had done. But through the Holy Spirit’s inspiration, their leader replied: ‘We believe that God is present in every place and where one of us prays, God is there and listens to his prayer. So destroy our churches and leave us our libraries and schools, because from schools and learning we know our creator, and we are His servants.’ When the king heard this good reply he was astonished and said to them: ‘Because you have preferred learning and books and paid respect to them before all else, your churches and schools shall be permitted to remain in their [present] state and you will stay as you are. So go away and take comfort.’

After another while a king (*malik*) appeared in Egypt who ruled over Egypt and what belongs to it, and over Jerusalem, Damascus and Antioch. He was called al-Ḥākim Bi-amrillāh [the ruler in the name of God] and he sent to all the governors and emirs (*al-ḥukkām wa-l-amārah*) in all his countries [the order] to destroy all the churches and monasteries under their jurisdiction. They followed his order and in less than three years destroyed 30,000 churches and monasteries and removed all consecrated objects from them. After that, some Christians exerted themselves and complained to the above-mentioned king. They rebuilt many of these churches.

Then appeared another king (*malik*) who imposed on all the Christians in his realm not to speak Greek, Syriac or Coptic. The tongues of those who disobeyed and did not speak Arabic were cut out and lead was cast in their mouth. The Jews used to incite the soldiers (*al-ajnad*) and inspectors (*al-mubāshirīn*) to do that and they reported to them those who did not speak Arabic. In their corruptness and falseness they [i.e. the Jews] used to walk around amongst the Christians in secret. [Then] they went and told the governors (*al-ḥukkām*) whatever they wanted. Those used to believe them and cut out many Christian tongues.

²¹ Sic. read: another.

The blessed Meletius, the Patriarch of Alexandria who lived in the days of [the Antiochian Patriarch] Yuwākīm Ibn Ziyādah,²² reports²³ that he saw in an old history book that when it was made obligatory for no one to speak in the above-mentioned languages, one of the kings (*mulūk*) became [especially] furious and sent [word] to the governors (*al-ḥukkām*) in all his provinces and ordered them to cut out the tongue of anyone not speaking Arabic. And the poor Christians had not yet learned the Arabic language well. But the governors did what the king had ordered. Those who counted the Christians whose tongues were cut out mention that they were 70,000. And those whose tongues were not cut out employed translators who knew the Arabic language and the language of the Christians for buying and selling in the markets. Therefore the Christians were in great distress, and many of them died. And those who used to preach and teach them died too. And they were no longer able to understand what they read and heard.²⁴

Macarius goes on to say that in this deplorable situation God had mercy on the poor Christians and sent them some able and pious men who translated the most important books into Arabic. About the work of these translators he says that they “explained to us necessary matters and omitted others because of their profusion; and they composed superb and useful tracts”.²⁵ But Macarius mentions also another reason why some works remained untranslated. He remarks about the famous ‘Abdallāh b. Faḍl al-Anṭākī: “He left the canons in Greek and Syriac, because they are the originals, so that we would not abandon these holy languages in which our holy fathers spoke.”²⁶ And Macarius saw himself clearly in the tradition of these pious translators: “And also I, the humble [servant of God], when I found a curious Greek book which contains matters of spiritual usefulness, I strove according to my ability and excerpted from it what did not exist amongst us.”²⁷

An analysis of the quoted passage reveals the following noteworthy features.

1. The rule of Islam is understood as a punishment or at least a trial imposed on the Christians by God.

²² Meletius Pigas was Patriarch of Alexandria from 1592 until 1602; Yuwākīm Ziyādah sat from 1593 until 1603 on the throne of Antioch.

²³ It is not possible to say to which work Macarius refers here; on the writings of Meletius Pigas see Nasrallah, *Histoire*, vol. IV/1, 168-169, 299.

²⁴ al-Zayyāt, *Khazā’in al-kutub*, 148-149.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 150.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

2. Macarius does not use words or designations directly connected with Islam. Thus he does not speak explicitly of Islam or the Muslims, and – with the exception of the eccentric al-Ḥākim Bi-amrillāh – he does not mention any figures from Islamic history, nor does he use titles for rulers which have a clear Islamic connotation, like caliph or sultan. Muslims are either named as “the others” (*al-ghayr*, *qabīlah ghayruhum*) or with non-religious designations of their offices and functions: kings, governors, emirs, soldiers, inspectors (*al-mulūk*, *al-ḥukkām*, *al-amārah*, *al-ajnād*, *al-mubāshirūn*). The reason for that is obvious. For fear of being punished, Macarius hesitated to criticise Islam directly, although the context shows without doubt that he is talking about Islam and the Muslims.
3. For Macarius the establishment and exercise of Muslim rule over Christians is marked by violence and oppression. The Christians were despised, humiliated, and even killed. They were forced to give up their faith and became subjected to a discriminating law; their places of worship and their ritual objects were desecrated and destroyed, and so on and so forth. For Macarius as a man of learning, the enforcement of another language and culture and the parallel harm to the original Syro-Hellenistic tradition has a special significance. Enforced Arabisation is seen as a process which was connected with an enormous loss of knowledge and identity.
4. It is striking to see the negative role Macarius attributes in these processes to the “accursed Jews”. He stresses several times that it was the Jews who in “their corruptness and falseness” incited the Muslim authorities to act against the Christians. This position clearly reveals deep-rooted anti-Jewish sentiments and is especially noteworthy because such attitudes – in modern times labelled as “anti-Semitism” – are normally seen as something imported in later centuries from the West to the Arab world, “whole cloth”, as Bruce Masters for instance put it.²⁸
5. The Muslim rulers are portrayed as not totally inaccessible to the requests and arguments of their Christian subjects. Thus the king who had faced the Christians of Damascus with the alternative of destroying either their schools or their churches finally, astonished and convinced by their wise answer, allowed them to remain undisturbed. And even from the mad caliph al-Ḥākim Bi-amrillāh the Christians were able to obtain permission to rebuild the churches which had been destroyed at his order.

²⁸ Bruce Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World. The Roots of Sectarianism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001, 124.

Here is not the place to discuss the historicity or truthfulness of Macarius' account. What matters is how he interpreted the influence Islam exercised on his community over the course of time. And the answer is obvious. Macarius is far from seeing in Islam a religion or political system that treated the Christians tolerantly as partners in cooperative action. Especially the formative period of Islam²⁹ in which the rulers were mostly of Arab origin is understood as a violent change in the Christians' existence, marked by discrimination and oppression. Thus the view of Macarius differs fundamentally from that upheld by his recent predecessors in the leadership of the Orthodox Church in the Arab world and many others.

²⁹ The last concrete event Macarius refers to is the persecution under al-Ḥākim Bi-amrillāh who died in 1021 AD.



The Christians under Ottoman Rule in the Writings of 18th Century Historians of Bilād al-Shām

HAYAT BUALUAN

Introduction

It is difficult to make generalizations about the situation of the Christians under Ottoman rule, especially in the presence of opposing opinions on the question of Muslim tolerance and intolerance. Some depict Islam as intolerant and oppressive, others picture a utopia in which Muslims and Christians worked together in harmony in a golden age of economic endeavour and intellectual development. There are others who question the meaning of tolerance altogether and consider it as a form of humiliation and objectification of others, and as depriving them from full membership in society.¹

This paper attempts to study the conditions under which the Christians lived in pre-modern Islamic societies from the arrival of Sultan Selim's army in Bilād al-Shām in the sixteenth century to the end of the eighteenth century. It will focus mainly on the subject of discrimination and tolerance as presented by the historians of 18th century Bilād al-Shām, mainly Ibn Jum'ah al-Maqqār in *al-Bāshāt wa-l-quḍāt fī wulāt Dimashq fī l-ʿasr al-Uthmānī* - Pashas and *Qāḍīs* among the Governors of Damascus during the Ottoman Age; Ibn Kīnān al-Ṣāliḥī in *al-Ḥawādith al-yawmiyyah fī tāriḫ aḥad ʿashar wa-miyah* (Daily Events in the years Eleven and one Hundred); al-Budayrī l-Ḥallāq in *Ḥawādith Dimashq al-yawmiyyah* (Daily Events in Damascus), Mīkhāyil Brayk in *Tāriḫ al-Shām* (The History of Damascus), Rufāyil Karāmah al-Ḥimṣī in *Ḥawādith Lubnān wa-Sūriyah* (The Events of Lebanon and Syria), and Ḥananyā l-Munayyir, *al-Durr al-marṣūf fī ḥawādith al-Shūf* (The Paved Treasures in the History of al-Shūf). While focussing on the subject of tolerance and discrimination, we will try

¹ See on this subject: Thomas Michael Scanlon, *The Difficulty of Tolerance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003; also, Kirsten Hastrup and George Ulrich, eds., *Discrimination and Tolerance: New Perspectives*, The Hague: Kluwer Law International 2002.

to describe the status of the Christians in Bilād al-Shām in that period, the restrictions imposed on them and the persecution that they were at times subject to. One can truly say that tolerance went hand in hand with discrimination in that period.² The position of the Christians as viewed by the chroniclers was in general tolerable, but insecure. Muslims, as a dominant majority, were willing to co-exist with Christians, but exercising discrimination against them. Persecution was rare and usually due to special circumstances. However, discrimination was inherent in the system and maintained by both the Sharīʿah (Islamic Law) and real life.³ Eighteenth century historians of Bilād al-Shām are eye-witnesses to the events they describe. In reviewing their writings, we hope to uncover important realities about a transitional period in the history of Bilād al-Shām, a continuation of a previous era of Islamic rule and a basis for future developments in the area which will eventually influence and determine Christian presence in the Middle East.

The Status of Christians under Ottoman Rule⁴

It is significant that the Muslim majority in the cities of Bilād al-Shām perceived their non-Muslim neighbors as existing outside the boundaries of their own social community. Christians might share residential quarters and working places with Muslims, but they were seldom included in the collective 'we' in the consciousness of their Muslim neighbors.

This impression is reflected in the written records left by Muslim chroniclers of the Ottoman centuries where non-Muslim lives were largely un-remarked. However, one can gather that Christians were considered to be at the bottom scale of the social order. In 1724, al-Budayrī l-Ḥallāq describes a marriage celebration in the palace of Fathī l-Ḍaftarī, a prominent personality. It seems that the marriage lasted seven days. The first day was for the governor of Damascus, the second day for the princes, the third for scholars, the fourth for traders and the fifth for Christians and Jews, the sixth for peasants, the seventh for prostitutes.⁵

² See Bruce Masters, ed., *Christians & Jews in the Ottoman Arab World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001.

³ See: Benjamin Braude & Bernard Lewis, eds., *Christians & Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, 2 vol., New York: Holmes & Meir Publishers 1982; Albert Hourani, *Minorities in the Arab World*, London: Oxford University Press 1947.

⁴ See a very good analysis of the status of Christians in Muslim society in: Stephen Humphrey, *Islamic History*, London: I.B. Tauris & Co. LTD 1995, 256-261.

⁵ Aḥmad al-Budayrī l-Ḥallāq, *Ḥawādith Dimashq al-yawmiyyah*, Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Karīm, ed., Damascus: Maṭbaʿah Lajnat al-Bayān al-ʿArabī 1959, 39.

Within this hierarchy, the Christians then are placed higher than the peasants and prostitutes at the bottom of the social scale. One can see here a psychological separation reciprocated by Christian chronicler's attitude who seldom commented on the events in the Muslim world unless they had a direct bearing on the lives or the fate of their own religious community. Al-Munayyir for instance mentions how Christians at certain moments concealed their activities and tried to pass unnoticed. He relates how the Christians built a convent near Ba'āqlīn in the Shūf district in a forest where shepherds used to feed their flocks. They were, according to the author, too weak to be able to construct the convent openly. They used to gather at night under the moon shine with their families to build the convent gradually to make up for the activities of the day. This is how this place came to be known as Dayr al-Qamar (Convent of the Moon).⁶

As we said before, the Muslim chroniclers did not focus on the Christian community. We see them mentioning the Christians among those present at the circumcision of Sulaymān Pasha's son or as messengers replacing the Muslim *kuttābs* (secretaries) when the latter were caught by the *ʿurbān* (the Bedouins).⁷ Here al-Budayrī l-Ḥallāq does not consider them as active members in the daily life of the city. Therefore, he rarely mentions them in his book *Ḥawādith Dimashq* except as present during social occasions or while uttering contemptuous comments against them. Ibn Kīnān, a contemporary historian, writes, while describing the riots in Damascus in 1720 and the atrocities committed: “[w]hat happened breaks the hearts and souls. These deeds are unbelievable - even monks and priests.”⁸ In this atmosphere of superiority of the dominant religion and the resulting insecurity of the Christians, how did the two communities interact?

It is very difficult to reconstruct the parameter of the social distance or the opportunities for cross communal interaction on a personal level that might have existed: conditions observed in one town might not have been found in another, and even in the same location, circumstances might have changed with time. However, one can gather information about the interaction of Christians with Muslims from the chroniclers of Bilād al-Shām.

Ibn Kīnān relates how Muslim scholars from Bilād al-Shām studied under Christian teachers, mentioning a certain Muḥammad Afandī Qarabjī

⁶ Ḥananyā l-Munayyir, *al-Durr al-marṣūf fī ḥawādith al-Shūf*, Beirut: n.p. 1984, 52.

⁷ al-Budayrī l-Ḥallāq, *Ḥawādith Dimashq*, 35, 52.

⁸ Ibn Kīnān al-Ṣāliḥī, *al-Ḥawādith al-yawmiyyah fī tārikh aḥad ʿashar wa-miyyah*, Akram al-ʿUlubī, ed., Damascus: Dār al-Tabbaʿ 1998, 61.

studying under a group of distinguished Rūm (*‘alā fuḍalā’ al-Rūm*). Muḥammad was later appointed as a judge.⁹ Al-Maqqār writes about a certain Šāliḥ Pasha who took loans from Damascus to travel to Bilād al-Naṣārā (Land of the Christians). After one year, Šāliḥ, according to the author, came back from Bilād al-Naṣārā.¹⁰ In Damascus, Christians, as the sources indicate, served in various non-communal government positions. They owned properties and were an important element in trade, industry and agriculture. Some of these Christians served as advisors to the pashas, treasury officials, accountants and clerks. For instance, al-Munayyir reports in 1787 about a certain Christian named Sa‘d al-Khūrī, who served as *mud-abbir* (manager) to Emir Muḥim.¹¹

Mīkhāyil Brayk recounts how Ismā‘īl Pasha al-‘Aẓm chose two brothers from Ḥimṣ, Ni‘mat and Yūsuf, as *yāzijiyyah* (secretaries), and later their descendents became known as Yāzījī family.¹² The Christians were also skilled workers. Sulaymān Pasha al-‘Aẓm’s palace was designed and built by Christian workers. In this context, al-Budayrī l-Ḥallāq mentions that in 1743, Christian constructors were tortured to reveal the hidden treasures in Sulaymān Pasha al-‘Aẓm’s palace.¹³

The Christians were regarded as Ahl al-Dhimmah (People of Pact). Muslim authorities would regard the monotheists to remain at peace within the Islamic state as long as they recognize Islam’s political authority over them. The Qur’ān recognizes the prophets of both Judaism and Christianity, but the authorities were at the same time warning their contemporaries of eternal damnation should they reject the prophet’s mission.

The concept of Ahl al-Dhimmah gives non-Muslims the right to own property and freedom of worship in return for the *jizyah* tax and a pledge not to assist ‘enemies of Islam’.¹⁴ With time the Christians became marginalized. The “Pact of ‘Umar” in the 9th century became part of the Muslim legal tradition and it eventually affected the treatment of non-Muslims in society.

⁹ Ibn Kīnān, *al-Ḥawādith al-yawmiyyah*, 292.

¹⁰ Ibn Jum‘ah al-Maqqār, *al-Bāshāt wa-l-quḍāt fī wulāt Dimashq fī l-‘asr al-‘Uthmānī*, Šalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid, ed., Damascus: no publisher 1949, 7-8.

¹¹ al-Munayyir, *al-Durr al-marṣūf*, 30, 69, 106.

¹² Mīkhāyil Brayk, *Tārīkh al-Shām*, Ḥarīṣā/Lebanon: Maktabat al-Qiddīs Būlus 1930, 7.

¹³ al-Budayrī l-Ḥallāq, *Ḥawādith Dimashq*, 35, 39, 88, 89.

¹⁴ On the protected people of the Islamic city see Louis Gardet, *L’Islam religion et communauté*, Paris: Desclée de Brouwer 1967, 132, 291, 338, 339, 340. On the covenant of ‘Umar see: Antoine Wessels, *Arabs and Christians*, Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House 1955, 14.

The Pact of ʿUmar imposes restrictions on non-Muslims. Ahl al-Dhimmah will be tolerated and protected, but they must pay special tax and are not allowed to carry arms, to give evidence against Muslims in the court of law or to marry Muslim women. Nonetheless, they are allowed to retain their own religious organization, personal status and places of worship.

One can see how the notion of equality was absent – the word “tolerates” here indicates that people from a superior position are accepting others who are considered inferior in status. This is how Christians were accepted, but they were religiously and socially distinct from the majority of the population. They were insecure and helpless in a state where their destiny depended on the caprice and tendencies of the ruler. This was in fact a world where an individual’s legal status depended on his or her religious identity.

Perhaps it is worthwhile mentioning here what Ibn Taymiyyah said about the Nuṣayris and the Druzes when he was asked if they were akin to the Jews and Christians. Ibn Taymiyyah affirmed that the Druzes and the Nuṣayris are not like the people of the book and that their repentance is not accepted. In his view, they were to be condemned and killed. Ibn Taymiyyah goes on to say that all religions other than Islam are equal in apostasy; however, those Christians who live among the Muslims should be treated like Ahl al-Dhimmah as long as they are among them (*fī dārinā*).¹⁵

This conveys a certain fanatical trend in Islam which at times was taken as a principle to follow in dealing with Christians. Yet even when a more moderate trend was adopted, the Christians remained ‘the other’. It was, in fact, the tolerance of the weak by the strong.

In 1785, as al-Munayyir relates, the consul of Russia and the consul of Austria were not allowed to live in Damascus. The notables of Damascus informed them that Damascus is the door of al-Kaʿbah and does not accept consuls. They had to return to where they came from.¹⁶

How was this ‘otherness’ as revealed above manifested according to 18th century historians of Bilād al-Shām?

Restrictions on *Ahl al-Dhimmah*

This brings us to our next concern in this paper that will deal with the restrictions that were imposed on Christians in Muslim society. For instance, it seems that Christians in Damascus and its environs did not suffer from persecution, though they were not free from certain restrictions. In 1517,

¹⁵ Ibn Jumʿah al-Maqqār, *al-Bāshāt wa-l-quḍāt*, 6-7.

¹⁶ al-Munayyir, *al-Durr al-marṣūf*, 79.

for example, the Christians were commanded not to ride horses, donkeys or other animals in the city or its suburbs whenever there was an assembly of people.

In 1581, the sultan commanded that Christians and Jews were to be prohibited from wearing turbans; they were ordered to wear a distinctive Christian headgear, the *qalnūsah* and *kababīs*.¹⁷ This attitude towards Christians was prevalent under the Ottomans. Christians were considered inferior, and whenever their beliefs were mentioned, it was followed by the remark *ʿalā zaʿmihim al-fāsid* (their null and depraved contention), or their void rites.¹⁸ Apart from this condescending attitude, Christians were limited in the freedom to build new places of worship. Mīkhāyil Brayk relates how, in 1757, Patriarch Sylvestros took advantage when Damascus was without a governor to build the church door and renovate the whole place.¹⁹

This is indeed an indication of the precarious situation of the Christians and their insecurity in leading their own lives. Brayk goes on to relate how in 1762, Christians were no longer required to welcome the commander of the pilgrimage with candles on his entry to Damascus.²⁰ This practice had either started or was reinforced in 1707. This practice was also followed when a new governor (*wālī*) from Istanbul arrived.

Ibn Kīnān indeed confirms that in 1707, the Pasha sent instructions to Christians and Jews: “On Monday the Pasha sent to the Christians and the Jews to carry candles and walk in front of the Pasha on his entry to Damascus”.²¹ Ibn Kīnān is taking the matter naturally. These were orders imposed on Ahl al-Dhimmah that they had to comply with. It is in fact a restriction on their freedom of action reflecting, as was mentioned before, their inferior status in the Islamic state.

These restrictions took varied forms at different times. Brayk goes on to relate how under Asʿad Pasha al-ʿAẓm, the Christians neglected the dress restrictions imposed on them with the exception of the colour green which was reserved for the notables (the governor, *wazīrs*, *ʿulamāʾ* and others) who promenaded publicly in gardens, openly drank wine and *ʿaraq*, built luxurious buildings and visited religious shrines without being molested.²²

¹⁷ See the details in Adnan Bakhit, “The Christian Population in the Sixteenth Century”, in Braude & Lewis, *Christians and Jews*, vol. 1: 26.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁹ Brayk, *Tārīkh al-Shām*, 47.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 73-74.

²¹ Ibn Kīnān, *al-Ḥāwādith al-yawmiyyah*, 126.

²² Brayk, *Tārīkh al-Shām*, 262-265.

In Brayk's account, one can see the limitations imposed on Ahl al-Dhimmah whether in clothing or in daily or public lives. He also relates how things changed under 'Abdallāh al-Shatjī, the governor of Damascus, when in 1759, he put thirteen Christians in prison because they had built churches in their houses, and he obliged them to pay money. Christians had to suffer from these restrictions, and Brayk puts the blame on women. He says: "The Christian Damascene women transgressed all limits – they ate sour grapes and their husband's teeth were set on edge. We truly say that women are the cause of every evil and oppression. When God Almighty saw them, he brought them back to their ancient humiliation. He humiliated their men and oppressed them."²³

All the above shows that restrictions imposed on Christians served to differentiate them from Muslims. These restrictions, though alleviated at times, remained a potent weapon in the hand of the governor, and they were possibly a psychological factor giving the Christian a feeling of insecurity and fear of future intolerance and persecution, especially at times when interaction and good relations were not the rule.

Persecution on Ahl al-Dhimmah

It appears, then, from the sources mentioned, that the Christians in Bilād al-Shām were not free from certain annoyances, exploitation and restrictions, which were at times rationalized and at other times counteracted by acts of benevolence and toleration. Non-Muslim subjects had a certain place that they were not allowed to go beyond.

Trouble arose when Christians seemed to be accumulating too much wealth or power. At times they were obliged to pay more than the *jizyah*. Ibn Kīnān reports how in 1712, the Ottomans allowed the destruction of the Church of Resurrection (Kanīsat al-Qiyāmah), because the Christians (al-Naṣārā) did not fulfil their promise to pay the extra money imposed upon them.²⁴ Brayk and al-Ḥimṣī report that the Christians were not only exploited by the governors, but also by different factions of the Janissaries. Brayk affirms that he heard from trustworthy authorities that Christians were obliged to pay a yearly sum to the governor.

At times, Christians were taken as scapegoats. In 1758, as al-Munayyir indicates, pirates molested a ship belonging to the people of Beirut. Muslims attacked the Iفرانج (Franks) in Beirut, entered the convent of al-Badiriyyah,

²³ See on this subject, Hayat Bualwan, "Mikhail Breik, a Chronicler and a Historian in 18th century Bilād al-Shām", in: *Parole de l'Orient* 21 (1996), 261-262.

²⁴ Ibn Kīnān, *al-Ḥāwādith al-yawmiyyah*, 188-189.

seized the monks, destroyed what was in the church and stole what could be of use to them.²⁵

It seems that other atrocities were committed, mostly during the rule of the Ottoman governor of Acre Aḥmad Pasha al-Jazzār. Brayk relates that in 1777, al-Jazzār desecrated convents and brought women and children to be sold in Damascus. He writes: “It was something that breaks the heart to see families roaming the streets to beg for food. Several people died from hunger and cold. Many women, boys and girls were bought by soldiers and then freed for the glory of God”.²⁶

On the part of the authorities, another rationalization for Christian persecution was the accusation that Christians were trading with the enemy. One such example was when the Muslims asked the Christians to cooperate with them against Bonaparte in 1799. A contemporary chronicler, Ibn Ṭrād, mentioned that the governors of Beirut forbade Christians from leaving the city. The Christians asked God to save them from this ordeal.²⁷ Another type of persecution was the result of the ruler’s initiative to raise money or to mobilize support among their people.

During the governorship of ‘Uthmān Pasha in Damascus, when Christians were unable to pay taxes imposed on them, they were attacked and molested in 1772. According to Brayk, these days were disastrous and a source of pity and distress.²⁸

Ibn Ṭrād, on the other hand, reports that in 1791, the Christians were not allowed to celebrate Easter festivities and were obliged to remain imprisoned in their houses. He continues saying that this time though, “Muslims interceded on their behalf with the authorities”.²⁹

As we mentioned before, at times persecutions, exploitation and annoyances were counteracted by toleration and benevolence. In 1519, for example, we read about Ottoman officials protecting the Christians. When an Ottoman Muslim killed a Christian, the governor of Damascus ordered his execution. Again in 1758, when pirates seized a ship near Beirut, in retaliation the Muslims in the city attacked the Christians in the Badiriyyah convent as mentioned above. The incident infuriated Emir Muḥim who then punished the instigators and executed two of them. The stolen goods were returned to their proper owners.

²⁵ al-Munayyir, *al-Durr al-marṣūf*; 24.

²⁶ Brayk, *Tārīkh al-Shām*, 108-109.

²⁷ See: ‘Abdallāh Ibn Ṭrād al-Bayrūtī, *Mukhtaṣar tārīkh al-asāqifah*, Naila Kaidbey, ed., Beirut: Dār al-Nahār 2002, 139-140.

²⁸ Brayk, *Tārīkh al-Shām*, 96.

²⁹ See the details in Ibn Ṭrād, *Mukhtaṣar tārīkh al-asāqifah*, 131-135.

In 1779, Brayk and al-Ḥimṣī both report that God inspired Muḥammad Pasha al-ʿAzm to show justice towards *al-Naṣārā*. He protected them and allowed them to build their churches.³⁰ Similarly, in 1780, the Naṣārā were accorded justice. What is important here is what Brayk relates about the above mentioned al-Jazzār, as he said that al-Jazzār showed justice towards the Christians. Ibn Trād goes further to mention how Muslims of Beirut mediated to alleviate Christian suffering when Christians were imprisoned for not paying taxes. Following these mediations, Christians were allowed to visit their families, although they had to return to prison later.³¹

A very meaningful example, perhaps, about the position of Ahl al-Dhimmah in Ottoman society, is what appeared in ʿAbbūd al-Sabbāgh’s book *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir fī tārikh Ḍāhir* (The blooming garden in the history of Ḍāhir). The story relates that in 1761 there was a feud between Ḍāhir al-ʿUmar and ʿUthmān Pasha, the governor of Damascus, which obliged the Ottoman Sultan to ask for reconciliation and hold a council in Acre to solve the feud.

During this council, Ibrāhīm al-Ṣabbāgh represented Ḍāhir al-ʿUmar, whilst Masʿūd Bey represented ʿUthmān Pasha, the governor of Damascus. Masʿūd was enraged at Ibrāhīm’s defense and asked him to leave the court since he was not entitled, as a Christian, to be present in a Muslim Sharīʿah court. The author goes on to relate how Ibrāhīm was about to leave the place when Ḍāhir al-ʿUmar interfered, held Ibrāhīm’s hand and with a loud voice proclaimed him in front of the assembly as his representative. Addressing Masʿūd Bey, he said: “You are ʿUthmān Pasha’s representative, and Ibrāhīm al-Ṣabbāgh is my representative. You are all here in the council witnesses to this... ”³²

Here is another picture of the position of Ahl al-Dhimmah in Bilād al-Shām. Ibrāhīm al-Ṣabbāgh, a Christian, was caught between Masʿūd Bey who resorts to Islamic law to discriminate against a Christian, and Ḍāhir al-ʿUmar, who represents benevolence and justice. The former bestows favors and is ready to withdraw these favors whenever he pleases, and the latter does not discriminate, but treats people on the basis of trust, benevolence and equality.

³⁰ Brayk, *Tārikh al-Shām*, 110-111.

³¹ Ibn Trād, *Mukhtaṣar tārikh al-asāqifah*, 13; Rūfāyil Karāmah al-Ḥimṣī, *Tārikh Lubnān wa-Sūriyah*, Bāsīliyūs Qaṭṭān, ed., Beirut: Kros. Bros., 59.

³² ʿAbbūd al-Ṣabbāgh, *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir fī tārikh Ḍāhir*, Manuscript, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale: Codex 4610, 20.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the Christians in Bilād al-Shām were often treated as conquered people. Their position as Ahl al-Dhimmah was regulated by law which conferred a certain status on them. If the law forbids them to rise above it, it also forbids Muslims to drag them down below. We find at times a certain respect for *dhimmīs*' monotheism, their scholarship and their being possessors of revealed books, even though these were seen as having been superseded by the Qur'ān. However, Christians were not to exceed their place nor violate the pact. Nonetheless, the *dhimmīs* were at times considered useful: they possessed skills which Muslims needed.

Here we differentiate between the status of the Christians and their role in Muslim society. The Christians were assigned a place, a status, a static category in that society, but their role was a dynamic one as mentors, scholars and skilled workers. It was in that society that Christians and Muslims interacted with Christians playing a major role in that structure. At the same time, internally the Christians remained Ahl al-Dhimmah and consequently 'the other'.

The concept of a Christian as 'the other' was intensified in the majority of the countries in Bilād al-Shām. This otherness could be forceful at times and weaker at other times and might rise, as was mentioned, to the utmost for the slightest causes, political, social or economic.

To what extent are this attitude and these laws present in our contemporary Arab Society? Are the few Christians in the Arab States accepted, but still suffering from discrimination? How does the state of Lebanon stand out as a unique example in the Arab World? As Jean Michel Billoud puts it: "Le problème n'est pas la survie des chrétiens au Proche-Orient, mais l'avenir du monde Arabe sans les Chrétiens"³³ (The problem is not Christian presence in the Middle East, but the future of the Arab World without the Christians).

³³ Jean Michel Billoud, *Histoire des Chrétiens d'Orient*, Paris: L'Harmattan 1995, 244.

Churches oriented towards Mecca: Tolerance among Shiites and Maronites in 17th Century Kisrawān, Lebanon

RAY JABRE MOUAWAD

In the seventeenth century, different cases of discrimination and tolerance occurred in Kisrawān, a district of Mount Lebanon. Two groups were concerned by these: Shiites and Maronites.

Their story was written by a Maronite village priest called Jirjis Zghayb¹ who, as many of his colleagues, was interested in his village's local history and its church. He wrote in *garshūnī*², Arabic written in Syriac characters, a type of scripture widely used by the Maronite clergy up to the 19th century.³ *Garshūnī* allowed Maronites to keep on using Syriac Aramaic, the script of their liturgy, and avoid at the same time non-Maronites' insight into their affairs. Thus local histories written in *garshūnī* by obscure village priests are an invaluable source of information for the history of Ottoman Lebanon. The author underlines for example the fact that he used Shiites sources, "asking each one of them about everything and reporting it as he heard and verified."⁴ The main theater of this Shiite Maronite interaction was the village of Ḥrājil, today entirely Maronite, in upper Kisrawān, one hour drive north of Beirut.

When the events described by priest Jirjis Zghayb took place in the first half of the 17th century, Ḥrājil and all the surrounding smaller farm-villages (*mazāri*^c) were exclusively inhabited by Shiites, while the center and the lower parts of Kisrawān were predominantly Sunni. Gradually, since the beginning of Ottoman occupation, Christians started to migrate into the district from the northern province of Tripoli. The story of Ḥrājil's priest describes precisely the period when the newcomer Maronite peasants settled in the predominantly Shiite villages.

¹ He was Ḥrājil's priest from 1701 to 1729.

² That the Maronites call *karshūnī*.

³ Jirjis Zghayb's story was edited in Arabic and published by Būlus Qara'ī, *ʿAwdat al-naṣārā ilā Jurūd Kisrawān*, Lebanon: Jarrūs Press (n.d.). For my translation of the last part of this text in English, see the Annex at the end of this article.

⁴ Qara'ī, *ʿAwdat*, 11, and 18, where he refers again to Shiite oral and written sources.

This paper intends to show that the relations of the two groups, and the way they perceived each other, was at first spontaneous; but it became at the same time the result of a larger political and judicial system in which they were evolving, i.e. the Ottoman Empire with its apparatus of laws and rules in the administration of its provinces.

Maronite Colonization of Kisrawān

The first step of Maronite colonization was achieved by buying land from the Shiites. In the case of Ḥrājil and its surrounding farms, it is a wealthy Maronite sheikh called Būnādir al-Khāzin who bought the first properties. Būnādir was himself the son of a Maronite immigrant to ʿAjaltūn-Kisrawān from Jbayl, who achieved an influential position as secretary of the Druze emir Fakhreddīn II Maʿn (1591-1633).

When the Maronite sheikh Būnādir first came to Ḥrājil to meet the Shiites because, according to the story, “they were annoying (*yatarādhalū*) the Christians (Naṣārā) of Mazraʿat ʿAshqūt, ʿAjaltūn, and Ballūnī”,⁵ he was humiliated. The Shiites of the village were unfriendly to him, and they even stole his coat (*mashlah*) from him, but he behaved as if he didn’t notice. The sheikh did not give up his task; he kept on coming back to Ḥrājil. He managed to establish some sort of relation with its inhabitants and was finally able to buy land from them at any cost, while the Shiites were selling very reluctantly and under economic pressure, bit by bit, pieces of their property. The sheikh died in 1647 and his son Būnawfal continued to come to Ḥrājil and buy land until, as writes the priest, “he started to acquire respect and position among the Shiites (Matāwilah).”⁶

Having succeeded in owning properties around Ḥrājil, Būnawfal al-Khāzin wanted to exploit them and started to look for laborers. Yet “no Christian wanted to settle among Shiites because they feared them. Sheikh [Būnawfal] asked Sunnis (Islām)⁷ from ʿAjaltūn, Faytrūn, and Qulayʿāt to become his sharecroppers (*shurakāʾ*) in Mazraʿat Kfar Dhibiyān and Ḥrājil, and give him the surplus [of their crop], but they could not live among Shiites. Some of them remained one or two years then left. Some Sunnis

⁵ Qaraʿlī, *ʿAwdat*, 11; Naṣārā or Nazarenes is a name commonly used by Muslims to call Christians; it is used in the Qurʾān; the use of this appellation by the Maronite priest to designate his own community shows it had become common.

⁶ Qaraʿlī, *ʿAwdat*, 15; Matāwilah was a name commonly given to Lebanon’s Shiites, which could have meant “those who follow ʿAlī”; the text uses this term exclusively all along to name the Shiites.

⁷ Popular term used by the author to designate Sunnis all along the text.

from ‘Ajaltūn remained four years at the sheikh’s [property] in Mazra‘at [Kfar Dhibiyān], and fought with the Shiites, but they also left and came back to ‘Ajaltūn.”⁸

Finally, sheikh Būnawfal was able to convince a Maronite peasant from Jbayl, Yūssif Ḥjaylī, to settle in one of Ḥrājil’s farms called Mazra‘at Kfar Dhibiyān. Nevertheless, just one year after his settlement there, the Shiites attacked him while he was laboring far from the village and killed him and his son.

In spite of the murder, in the years to come Christians started bit by bit “to settle in Mazra‘at Kfar Dhibiyān, to settle in ‘Ashqūt and to progress”, wrote the priest, observing that

the Shiites got poorer, [and] the government was persecuting them. Christians started to come to the Jurd (high mountain) and settle in Mayrūbā and Biq‘ātā. The sheikh was looking [again] for a Christian to settle in Ḥrājil on his property, but nobody was willing to do that. He only found Fāris Shqayr from Ghbālīn (Jbayl) who accepted to take care of the sheikh’s property in Ḥrājil. Everyone refused, there was only him. He was the first one to settle [definitely] in Ḥrājil.⁹

For the first time, a Maronite peasant came to live in one of the Shiites’ strongholds of Kisrawān, their main village of Ḥrājil. Fāris Shqayr came in 1663, and started to buy properties from the Shiites on behalf of sheikh Būnawfal al-Khāzin. He also attracted many Christians, going after each one of them to bring them there, one after the other.¹⁰

Maronites’ Request for the Construction of a Church in Ḥrājil

The next step, after the time when Christians started to acquire land from the Shiites village and then settled among them, is their request to build a church. For years Ḥrājil’s Christians, who came to form a group of five houses, were forbidden by the Shiites to practice their religion in the village. On Sundays and for their religious feasts they went to church at another village, Mazra‘at Kfar Dhibiyān.

“In the end”, writes the priest, “the Christians started to ask the Shiites to let them build a church in the village. They told them: we cannot stay without a church where we can celebrate mass and without tombs where we can bury our dead.”

⁸ Qara’lī, *‘Awdat*, 16.

⁹ Qara’lī, *‘Awdat*, 17-18.

¹⁰ Qara’lī, *‘Awdat*, 20, see also the Annex at the end of this article.

This last argument proved to be decisive: the Christians needed a cemetery to bury their dead. At first, the Shiites met their request with a staunch refusal: “A church being built in Ḥrājil that was considered to be the best village of the Shiites! It could not be.” Yet, after many supplications and interventions, they finally admitted: “We cannot stay without you; you became friends and you are better than others. Build a church outside the village, and let it be far away.”¹¹

The formal agreement of the Shiites was a major step in the relations between the two groups, and certainly a proof of tolerance, as it is always difficult for any group in the countryside in any part of the world to integrate alien elements.

The next request of the Christians proved to be more problematic for the Shiite villagers. After agreeing to the construction of a church in their “main village”, but out of sight, far away, the Christians had a new request: they wanted to build their church on the site of an ancient one which, according to them, existed in the village before Shiites came to Ḥrājil. This church of al-Sayyidah (the Virgin), said the Christians, was dedicated to the Virgin Mary and was destroyed by the Sunnis who were living in Ḥrājil before the Shiites. In the process, they had changed its name from al-Sayyidah, the Virgin, to al-Sawdah, the Black [spot].¹²

At that point, comments the priest, “the Shiites exploded and told them: do not speak to us of this again; nobody must hear about it, and if you raise the matter again there will be a great conflict between us. So the Christians backed down, and avoided to say that they wanted to build the church on its ancient location.”

To understand the Christians’ demand, one should refer to the general Islamic Law, the Sharī‘ah, that prevailed in the Ottoman Empire at the time; Lebanon’s territory was part of that Empire and the Ottomans followed the Ḥanafī School of Law that, like the three other main schools of Islamic Law, forbade the construction of new synagogues and churches in the cities of the Islamic world, including the territories close to those

¹¹ All quotes taken from in Qara’lī, *‘Awdat*, 20, and see the Annex for all quotations concerning the church.

¹² This change of name is of course discriminatory. The period of Shiites’ settlement in Kisrawān seems to precede the Ottoman occupation of Bilād al-Shām in 1516, and may be dating from the Fatimid period of the 10th to 11th centuries. Mamluk occupation of Lebanon in the aftermath of the Crusades was a blow to the Shiite population who tried to resist them with the help of Christians and Druzes during the Mamluks’ military campaigns of 1292 and 1305. In 1306, the Mamluks had a Sunni Turkoman clan, the ‘Assāf, settle in Kisrawān. Hence the Sunni presence there.

cities (at a distance of one mile as states Abū Ḥanīfah).¹³ In this judicial context, Christians were only allowed to restore their churches, but not to build new ones. This is why, in the course of their migration to Kisrawān during the Ottoman period, they often found the pretext of the presence of ruins of an ancient church around to abide by the law which allowed them to “restore” a church, not to “build” a new one. For instance, in Kisrawān and at the same period, Christians met an opposition to build a church on two occasions: in 1628, the monk Yūḥannā l-Muḥāsib wanted to “restore” the monastery of Mār Shallīṭā Miqbis (near Ghustā) but Muslims of the area opposed him, arguing that he did not have the right to “build” a church. He was nevertheless able to proceed with the help of Būnādir al-Khāzin who bribed judges from Beirut to convince them “that it was not a church.”¹⁴ The second occasion occurred in the village of ‘Ajaltūn which was mainly Sunni at the time, but where the Maronite Khāzins had settled. Here again “Muslims from Beirut” opposed the construction of a church dedicated to the Virgin without an authorization (*firmān*) of the Sultan from Istanbul. Finally, the influential Būnādir al-Khāzin used the same method to convince the judges that it was not a church, and its construction was completed.¹⁵

The district of Kisrawān was not the only one that had to abide by these rules, as they were applied to Christians in other parts of Mount-Lebanon as well. For example in the year 1567, soldiers (*bayārik*) from Tripoli invested the Maronite patriarchal see of Qannūbīn, plundered it and asked a sum of 2000 piaster as a fine (*gharīmah*) for the new church that, according to them, had been built without proper authorization, and patriarch Mikhā’il al-Rizzī who was freshly elected “was in a great pain”.¹⁶ Similarly, when the Greek Orthodox monks of Balamand in Muḥarram 1123/1711 needed to add a barn (*iṣṭabl*) and four rooms to their convent, they had to get an official authorization from the judge of the Ottoman Islamic tribunal

¹³ Antoine Fattal, *Le statut légal des non-musulmans en pays d’islam*, Beirut: Imp. Catholique 1958, 174. These restrictions on churches and synagogues’ building are mentioned already in the corpus of laws of Abū ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim Ibn Sallām (774-837), *The Book of Revenue, Kitāb al-Amwāl*, English trans. by Imran Ahsan Khan Nyazee, The Center for Muslim Contribution to Civilization, UK: Garnet Publishing 2003, 95.

¹⁴ al-Manṣūr Ḥattūnī, *Nubdhah tārikhiyyah fī l-muqāṭa‘ah al-Kisrawāniyyah* [1884 no ed.]. 2nd ed. Kaslik: Dār Nazīr ‘Abbūd 1997, 77.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁶ Iṣṭifān al-Duwayhī, *Tārīkh al-Azminah*, Buṭrus Fahd, ed., Beirut: Dār Laḥad Khāṭir 1983, 430.

of Tripoli.¹⁷ And in the Metn area overlooking Beirut, all the monasteries built (often “restored” on ancient ruins) in the course of the 17th and 18th centuries got an official authorization from the Druze emirs of the district, the Abillama^c.¹⁸

In the case of Ḥrājil, the Christians argued with the Shiites precisely because of that legal constraint: there was an ancient church in the village, they told them, and we have to build our new one there, on its ruins, and nowhere else. They were naturally afraid of the consequences with regard to the higher Ottoman authorities, if they “built” a church, rather than “restored” an old one.

Ḥrājil’s Christians finally overcame the initial refusal of the Shiites to build the church on the ancient ruins with irresistible arguments:

“For us, we shall make it very small, only as a drawing (*rasm*), otherwise we want to leave. And for us, we are your partners and indebted to you. We submit to your orders, and live among your women (*ḥarīmukum*), your elders and your youngsters. Be generous for what we ask.” Part of the Shiites kept silent, and others persisted in their refusal. In the end, the Christians were able to obtain the Shiites’ authorization to build a church at the ancient location, but under clear conditions: “If they do not follow them”, they said, “we shall destroy [the church] immediately and we shall kill them.”¹⁹

Conditions for the Construction of the Church in Ḥrājil

The first condition imposed on Christians was that the altar (*madhbaḥ*) of the church had to be oriented towards the south (*qiblah*), in other words towards Mecca.

This was a very unusual condition that I only met in some churches of Kisrawān in that period, the 17th century. At least two other churches in addition to Ḥrājil’s were built oriented towards the south in that district, the church of the monastery of Mar Shallitā Miqbis (Ghustā) and the church of al-Sayyidah in ‘Ajaltūn. The Christians there were probably subjected to the same kind of pressure. The orientation to the south went against

¹⁷ Mss. Balamand = *Maḥfūzāt Dayr Sayyidat al-Balamand al-Baṭriyarkī, wa-Dayr al-Nabī Iliyās al-Baṭriyarkī, Shuwayyā, wa-Dayr al-Qiddīs Yūḥannā l-Maʿmadān, Dūmā, Jāmʿiat al-Balamand, Qism al-tawthīq wa-l-dirāsāt al-Anṭāqiyyah*, Beirut 1995. Manuscript BAL 80.

¹⁸ For example, the Abillama^c’s patronage is openly displayed in an inscription over the entrance door of the convent of Mār Jitjis al-Kafr near Ḥammānā dated 1691. See Iṣṭifān Frayḥā l-Bishʿalānī, “Tanaṣṣur al-amīr ‘Abdallāh al-Lamʿī”, *al-Mashriq* 19 (1921), 271-277, here 276.

¹⁹ Qaraʿī, *ʿAwdat*, 21.

the oldest Christian tradition of church building which always had the altar oriented towards the East. The reasons why Christians prayed towards the East are explained in many ancient texts. Explanations provided by a contemporary to these events, the Maronite patriarch Iṣṭifān al-Duwayhī (1670-1704), summarize the Syriac Christian tradition on the matter:

The pure Apostles commanded that we pray towards the East, first because this is where God made our first ancestors [Adam and Eve]²⁰. [And] Saint Ephrem²¹ said ‘Jews pray towards Jerusalem because it is the city of their sanctuary, as for us, our sanctuary is Paradise, our ancient dwelling, and because it was in the East, He ordered us to pray towards it’ [...]

Secondly, it was also said (*qīla*) that when He [Jesus] was crucified, his face was turned to the West and people were looking at him spiritually (*bi-ʿayn al-ʿaql*) oriented to the East.

Thirdly, [we pray towards the East] because the sun rises from the East. And as Christ is the sun of innocence, the son of Zacharia [John the Baptist] called him the ‘Rising One’, we must turn towards him to solicit him where He rises.

Fourthly, we pray towards the East because it is the source of light, as the West is the place of darkness. Therefore the sons of light must reject Satan that is in the place of darkness and look for the father of light at the place of his consecration.

Five, the faithful turn towards the East to distinguish themselves from the Jews who commanded to pray towards the West.²²

“For these reasons and other similar ones”, Duwayhī concludes, “it became traditional in the Church to build the altars and the churches cupola oriented towards the East, so the priest could consecrate the offerings in that direction, then turn towards the West for the blessings [of the faithful].”²³

However, the Christians of Ḥrājil and of other parts of Kisrawān were obliged to build their churches oriented towards Mecca, which therefore went against one of their most ancient traditions.

The other condition imposed on them was that the church had to look and sound as little as a church possibly could: It could not have a *nāqūs*²⁴,

²⁰ Genesis 2, 8: “The Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the Orient, and placed there the man he had formed”, King James Bible.

²¹ Mār Ephrem of Nisibis (d. 373) was one of the greatest poets and theologians of the Syriac speaking Churches.

²² Iṣṭifān al-Duwayhī, *Manārat al-Aqdās* [1896], Rashīd al-Shartūnī, ed., 2 vols., Beirut: Imp. Catholique, reprint Joseph Raidy Printing Press (n.d.), vol.1, 59.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ The *nāqūs* was a piece of wood, or metal, which was struck with a stick to call Christian to prayer.

the equivalent of the bell in our days, to call for prayer, nor cymbals, “nor anything associated with the churches of the Christians”, as the text specifies.²⁵ This discretion corresponds once more to provisions of Islamic Law concerning the cult of the *dhimmīs*; a public display of the Cross was forbidden, and they were not allowed public processions.²⁶

The name of the church was the last condition, as it had to be non-Christian: “You will not say the church of Ḥrājil”, said the Shiites, “or the Lady (Virgin) of Ḥrājil”. The Christians answered them: “We shall abide by everything you say, and you will name it yourselves; and as you say it will be.”²⁷ The Shiites debated among themselves and said: “We shall not name it.” At that time there was an almond tree near the location of the church’s construction, [so] it was called “The Lady of the Almond Tree” (Sayyidat al-Lawzah); they gave the almond tree to the church and all the conditions were respected.²⁸

This is how Christians built their first church in the Shiite village of Ḥrājil in 1670. As stated earlier, this is a story of tolerance that ends up well. Approximately one century later, in 1772, the church of al-Sayyidah was transferred to another location in the village, and according to the text “its entrance door was towards the South (*qiblah*) and its altar towards the East”, a clear sign that when they had the chance in the 18th century to do as they wished, Christians came back to their own religious tradition.²⁹

Discrimination against Shiites

The new freedom enjoyed by the Christians of Kisrawān was possible at that time because life in the district had changed tremendously. The same Shiites who had formed a majority in upper Kisrawān and whom everyone had feared were forced to leave this area and other parts of Mount Lebanon collectively by the end of the 17th century.

The reasons for their expulsion from upper Kisrawān were the result of discrimination exercised against them by various parties upon orders that came directly from Istanbul. The Ottoman governors of Tripoli and Sidon-Beirut were commanded to implement these orders in their respective

²⁵ Qara’ī, *‘Awdat*, 21.

²⁶ Restrictions also mentioned by Ibn Sallām, *The Book of Revenue*, 95.

²⁷ Qara’ī, *‘Awdat*, 21.

²⁸ The origin of the name of other churches in Kisrawān, like for example Sayyidat al-Ḥaqlah or the Virgin of the Field, near Dlibtā, may be similar.

²⁹ Mār Shallitā Miqbis was also later re-oriented. The church of Sayyidat ‘Ajaltūn was not and remains oriented to the south.

provinces. Without going into a detailed account of Lebanese and Ottomans politics at the time to explain why the Shiites were expelled from Kisrawān and other parts of Lebanon like the Bsharrī district, we may understand the discrimination they suffered at the time through a simple semantic exercise that shows how the roots of discrimination in the Ottoman Empire came from above, i.e. the laws and the government itself:

In the Ottoman archives of that period, the Shiites of Mount Lebanon who were said to be clients of the important Ḥamādah clan from Baʿalbak, are unequivocally referred to as Kizilbāsh, the name of a heterodox Muslim sect from eastern Anatolia and Azerbaijan whose leaders became the founders of the Persian Safavid Empire.³⁰ Therefore Lebanese Shiites, just by the way they were designated in the Ottoman official correspondence, were associated with the enemy of the Ottomans at their eastern frontier. In light of those documents, the Shiites of Mount Lebanon equally appear as rebellious people and a source of constant trouble to the others sects.

The appellation Kizilbāsh was often associated with disparaging epithets that had a religious connotation. They were the “heretic (*revafid*) Kizilbāsh villains”,³¹ or “the accursed Kizilbāsh, inhabitants of the mountains of Tripoli who ought to be removed.”³² Shiites were also labeled as “atheist (*malāḥidah*)” and “wicked people (*ehl-i fesād*).”³³

These villains (*eşkiya*)”, states one of those letters sent from Istanbul to the governor of Tripoli, “ruin the villages around Tripoli and continuously cause harm to the Muslims [Sunnis]. [News of] this [state of affairs] has reached my imperial ears [...] Now, upon the arrival of my noble order, pay attention to the vital question related to this duty [namely] the protection of the territory and the promotion of the people’s prosperity [...] have your men fully equipped and all of the soldiers and men capable of carrying arms in the *eyalet* of Tripoli ready and prepared. Contact the aforementioned vizier [Mustapha Pasha, governor of Sidon-Beirut] and the *mutesellims* of Damascus and Aleppo and others as necessary[...] God willing you will attack the rebellious Ibn Maʿan.³⁴ Cleanse the area of all the *Kizilbāsh* and villains, and purify it of their filthy bodies. By performing this duty, you will render an important service to the faith and to my

³⁰ Abdul-Rahim Abu-Husayn, *The View from Istanbul, Ottoman Lebanon and the Druze Emirate*, London, New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers 2004, 10. Kizilbāsh means “Red Head”. The Safavid dynasty ruled in Persia (1502-1736).

³¹ Abu-Husayn, *The View from Istanbul*, 39.

³² Abu-Husayn, *The View from Istanbul*, 39-40.

³³ Abu-Husayn, *The View from Istanbul*, 44.

³⁴ Aḥmad Maʿn (1667-1697), a Druze, descendant of Fakhreddīn II who was resisting Ottoman orders.

exalted state [...] As for the followers of the aforementioned villains, do not attack their possessions, persons, children, or families if they become obedient to my imperial [majesty]. Protect them in every way, and abide and be cautious.³⁵

This letter, which is a sample of the official correspondence between the central government in Istanbul and its provincial governors, illustrates by its tone an official discrimination against a group of the Empire; it is careful at the same time to preserve justice and not persecute the Shiites in case they abide by Ottoman law, which was after all the main goal of the Ottomans.

Discriminating Names in Official Ottoman Correspondence

Other expressions found in the Ottoman archives are equally discriminatory towards other groups: the term Muslim for example meant exclusively “Sunni Muslim”. As for the Christians, they were commonly referred to as *kāfirīyyah* (unbelievers). For example the tax levied in the course of the sixteenth century on the grapes and grape wines of the northern district of Tripoli was officially labeled in the Ottoman archives as the tax of “*al-kāfirīyyah*”.³⁶

As to the Franks and Jews who used to pass by Beirut en route for the holy places, their fees were referred to as *bāj-i keferēh ḥujjāj-i naṣārā ve yahudiyyān* “the fees of the unbelieving pilgrims of the Nazarenes (Christians) and the Jews.” Similarly, those Franks who resided in Beirut for trade were to pay an additional tax, called the *bāj-i tujjār-i kuffār*, or “the tax of the unbelieving merchants”.³⁷

In Jerusalem, the Ottomans collected fees from Christian pilgrims, described as *mahsūl-i resmi Dār al-Qumāma*.³⁸ It means “fees of the House of the Sweepings” which designates the tax on the visitors of the church of the Resurrection (Qiyāmah) in Jerusalem, not even referred to as a church but as a “house (*dār*) of the sweepings.” Arab authors before the Crusades already

³⁵ Abu-Husayn, *The View from Istanbul*, 39-62; 104-108. He translated several letters from the Ottoman archives, addressed to the Ottoman governors of Damascus or Tripoli on the Shiite rebellion in Lebanon between October 1691 and 1695. This particular one is from the MD (Mühimme Defteri) 105, no. 10, early Shawwāl 1105/May-June 1694: order to the *beylerbey* of Tripoli, Arslan, 39-41.

³⁶ See ‘Issām Kamāl Khalīfah, *Shimāl Lubnān fī l-qarn al-sādis ‘ashar*, Beirut: no publisher 1999, 144-145 on the grape wines of the „Kāfirīyyah”; he is referring to the *Tābū Daftarī* no. 513.

³⁷ Bakhit, “The Christian Population of the Province of Damascus”, 40.

³⁸ Bakhit, “The Christian Population of the Province of Damascus”, 48.

used this term, like the geographer al-Muqaddasī in the 10th century,³⁹ the difference for our purpose is that the Ottomans used it to designate a tax in the official proceedings of their administration.

Studying cases of discrimination and tolerance in the past as we just did for Maronites and Shiites in Lebanon at a particular period, the 17th century, raises the question of the degree to which such questioning is justifiable. Is it not projecting contemporary notions of human rights and equality to periods and societies where these concepts had not yet developed? Yet trying to outline historical patterns of discrimination and tolerance may be equally necessary to understand crucial aspects of a group's behavior in modern times. In the case of Lebanon, a country based on the co-existence of different religious communities, it proves necessary to re-consider the history and interaction between the groups as each one perceived it from inside, and underline at the same time the degree to which the behavior of each group and its fate was linked to the general context of the Ottoman Empire.

Annex

History of the Church of the Lady of the Almond Tree (Sayyidat al-Lawzah)

[p. 18] I, the priest Jirjis Zghayb whom I serve the village of Ḥrājil, wrote the story of the [church of] Sayyidat al-Lawzah that was built in Dārat al-Sawdah (the Black House). After close scrutiny and many questions to the Christians (Naṣārā) and the Shiites (Maṭāwīlī), I found Shiite chronicles that shed light on the antiquity of the church, its dedication to the Lady (the Virgin), the noblest blessing be on Her, and on the existence of Shiites in that village, and before them of Sunnis (al-Islām), and before the Sunnis of Christians, and about the coming of the Christians after the Shiites. [I also found stories] on the burning of Ḥrājil in the days of the Shiites, and on the acquisition [p. 19] of their properties by the sheikhs of the Khāzin family, and on the existence of all the Shiite families and the Christian families who came there one by one.

The church that bears the name of the Lady Mary (al-Sayyidah Maryam) in Ḥrājil is very old; it was built at a time where the Christians were living in the village; [then] the Sunnis came and expelled them; they (the Christians) left the village for the district (*bilād*) of ‘Aqūrā and further away. The Sunnis settled in the place of the Christians. At that time

³⁹ al-Muqaddasī, *The Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions (Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm fī Maʿrifat al-Aqālīm)*, trans. Basil Collins, reviewed by Mohammed Hamid Altaʿi, The Center for Muslim Contribution to Civilization, UK: Garnet Publishing 2001, 35; see also the use of this term by ʿImād al-Dīn al-Isfahānī (1125-1201) who wrote the account of the conquest of Jerusalem “*al-Fath al-Qussī fī l-Fath al-Qudsī*”.

they destroyed the church to the core. Only the central part (*al-dārah*) remained which they used to simply call ‘the *dārah* of the Lady Mary.’ The Sunnis remained [for a while], then sold their properties to sheikhs of the Ḥamādah family (*bayt*). The sheikhs of the Ḥamādah family sent after Shiites from the Ba‘albak district and settled them in Ḥrājil. The year of their arrival is 1505. I saw their date according to the Islamic calendar, and I calculated and got this result for the time of their arrival. Those who came from Ba‘albak were four families: the house of Mshayk, the house of Za‘rūr, the house of Suwaydān and the house of Yāsīn; they settled in the village; other Shiites started to come too and they increased until the village numbered 370 houses. They owned it, giving the tithe (*al-‘ushr*) and the money of the individual tax (the *fard*) to the government of Damascus.

In the village they kept the same names, they did not change any except for the name of the Dārat al-Sayyidah (the House of the Virgin) that they re-named Dārat al-Sawdah (the Black House). It is said that it was not to include the name of the Virgin.

The Shiites remained in the village for 140 years, without any external contact. After that the sheikh Būnādir al-Khāzin went up and visited them in Ḥrājil and established amicable relations with them. They started to be indebted to him. He then bought two little properties from those who were in need. He bought [them] in the year 1648 and then allowed the sharecroppers to work the land.

Then sheikh Būnawfal succeeded his father Būnādir and got acquainted with the Shiites more than [p. 20] his father. He bought even more [properties] and brought Fāris Shqayr, who was from the village of Ghbālīn, to watch over his properties. Fāris Shqayr came in the year 1663. He is the first Christian who settled in the village and his house was located near the Dārat al-Sawdah towards the south. Fāris Abū Nasr Shqayr bought many properties from the Shiites on behalf of the sheikh. He attracted many Christians, going after each one of them to bring them there one after the other. Those who came had their names recorded in [each of] the families’ record.

The Christians of the village obeyed the Shiites and were their partners. They formed a group of five Christian houses and as to their religion (sic.: *diyānahunna*), they (the Shiites) did not allow them to practice it. They would go to church at Mazra‘at Kfar Dhibiyān on Sundays and on feast-days because there was no church in their village. They lived seven years without a church. In the end, the Christians started to ask the Shiites to let them build a church in the village. They told them: ‘We cannot stay without a church where we can celebrate mass and without tombs where we can bury our dead.’

The Shiites refused this, a church being built in Ḥrājil that was considered to be the best village of the Shiites. It could not be. Yet, after many supplications and interventions the Shiites [finally] admitted: ‘We cannot

stay without you; you became friends and you are better than others. Build a church outside the village, and let it be far away.'

The Christians talked to them again: 'Allow us to build it on its ancient location, at the place where you told us there was a church destroyed by the Sunnis and of which only the *dār* of the Lady (house of the Virgin) 5 to us of this again; nobody must hear about it, and if you raise the matter again, there will be a great conflict between us.' So the Christians backed down, and avoided to say they wanted to build the church on its ancient location.

After a while they started again to talk to the Shiites and to argue with them: 'For us, we shall make it very small, only as a drawing, otherwise we want to leave. And for us, we are your partners and are accountable to you. We are submitted to your orders, and live among your women (*ḥarīmukum*), your elders and your youngsters. Be generous for what we are asking.' Part of the Shiites kept silent, and another [p. 21] part persisted in its refusal. At the end, they addressed a few among the Shiites who authorized them to build a church on the ancient location. 'We shall set conditions for them; if they do not follow them, we shall destroy it immediately and we shall kill them.' Yet that location was on the property of Abū 'Īssā Mshayk. They told them: 'Go to Bū 'Īssā and talk to him about the location.' The Christians went to Bū 'Īssā and talked to him. He told them: 'I have consideration for you, but if the village inhabitants do not agree I shall not give it, otherwise they will treat me badly.' The elders among the village inhabitants came to him and told him to sell a little part. He finally conceded them four arms (*dhirā'*) in width and seven arms in length not counting the construction of the walls, and eight arms west of the church for a cemetery (*jabānah*) to bury their dead. The elders of the Shiites came and traced the location of the church and of the cemetery; they posed conditions by asking the Christians: 'Listen, at first the altar must be [oriented] towards the south (*qiblah*); it must not have a *nāqūs*, nor cymbals, nor anything associated with the churches of the Christians. It is [simply] a church and you will pray in it. You will not say 'the church of Ḥrājil', or the 'Lady of Ḥrājil'. The Christians told them: 'We shall abide by everything you say, and you will name it yourselves; and as you say it will be.' The Shiites debated among themselves and said: 'We shall not name it.' At that time there was an almond tree near the location of the construction site of the church, [so] it was called 'The Lady of the Almond Tree' (Sayyidat al-Lawzah); they gave the almond tree to the church and all the conditions were respected. The Shiites told the Christians: 'See, if these conditions are not followed you will die and your cult place (*ma'badukum*) will be seized by us immediately, but if you follow them, build your church and we shall support you (*nujīrukum*) and help you build your cult place.' The Christians approved and did as they wanted.

They immediately started the construction of the church on the field. It was built in 1671. This year its construction was terminated; its roof

counted 11 beams without footbridge, and its door was oriented towards the west; its altar was oriented towards the south as that was the condition.

The monk-priest (*qass*) John from Bān (Qadisha Valley) was the first who came to celebrate mass on Sunday and on feast-days only.

The second who came to celebrate mass on al-Sayyidah's altar was Daniel al-Kfūrī in the year 1673; he would stay at Fāris Shqayr's [house].

The third who served at the altar of al-Sayyidah was [p. 22] the priest Ya'qūb al-Muqaḥḥal from the village of Ghbālīn in the year 1675. He died in Ḥrājīl, and was buried in Ghbālīn.

The fourth who served at the altar of al-Sayyidah was the priest Yūsuf 'Aqīqī from Mazra'at Kfar Dhibiyān in the year 1696. He is dead and was buried in Mazra'at. In his days, the Shiites left and none of them remained in Ḥrājīl. They went towards Ba'albak.

The fifth one who came is me, the priest Jirjis Zghayb, author of this history in the year 1701. At the time of priest Yūsuf 'Aqīqī, the cemetery (*dafn al-mawtā*) was transferred from Sayyidat al-Lawzah to the property of Rayfūn's *waqf* with the consent of its owners.

[An anonymous continuator wrote]

In the year 1772 the church was transferred from its location to the property of Rayfūn's monastery, with the authorization of bishop Buṭrus Mubārak⁴⁰ who donated the place of the [new] church with the fallow (*būr*) up to the corner and the (cutting?) *miqsal* of the mulberry tree close to Būḥanna's one as *waqf*. They built the church on a pillar that had two bridges; its door was oriented towards the south (*qiblah*) and its altar towards the east, and it was named al-Sayyidah (the Lady). Only a drawing (*rasm*) remained of the Lady of the Almond Tree and [people] still go visit it, light [candles] and pray there.

Year 1722, end end end.

⁴⁰ ishoph of Ba'albak 1787-1807. He was a monk of the Rayfūn monastery.

The *Jizyah* in Lebanon during the Ottoman Period

SOUAD SLIM

The levying of *jizyah* in Mount Lebanon is a matter much debated by historians and chroniclers. It pertains to matters closely related to Christian-Muslim relations such as protection, *jihād*, and citizenship; these matters were relevant throughout different phases of Mount Lebanon's history during the Ottoman period. Taxes constitute a unique source of information about the relations of the mountain dwellers and the local authorities, i.e. the *muqāṭaʿiyyah* (Druzes and Sunnites) and the central authorities (*wālīs* and sultans). When evaluating the *jizyah*, historians disagree on two matters. The first one deals with Christian-Muslim relations in the East. For some historians, the *jizyah* is regarded as a factor of discrimination and separation among the subjects in the different Arab provinces,¹ whereas other historians see it as a sign of Muslim tolerance and good treatment of Christians, and consider that the *jizyah* did not constitute a heavy load when compared to the taxes levied, for example, on the region before the Arab conquest by the Byzantine authorities.² The second matter is that historians disagree in their approach of the history of Mount Lebanon during the Ottoman reign. Some historians support the argument that Mount Lebanon enjoyed at the time some measure of independence, and that local authorities did not levy any taxes on Christians.³ On the other hand, there are documents which have been examined by a new generation of historians and that certify that the *jizyah* was levied during all the political systems that prevailed in Mount Lebanon during the Ottoman reign.

¹ Olivier Clément, *Dialogues avec le Patriarche Athénagoras*, Paris: Fayard 1969.

² Ḥasan al-Zayn, *Ahl al-kitāb fī l-majmaʿ al-islāmī*, Beirut: Dār al-fikr al-ḥadīth 1982.

³ Younis Mas'ud, *Propriétés et relations familiales au Mont-Liban*, Beirut: Publications de l'Université Libanaise 1981, 31.

Definition

Jizyah, starting with the first Islamic centuries, was considered as a substitute for the protection guaranteed by Muslims to *dhimmīs*. *Jizyah* was nothing but a kind of a poll tax by which an individual purchased the right not to be called to arms. After the political settlement of Muslims in Bilād al-Shām, and especially after the administrative and monetary Tanzīmāt reforms in the 19th century, the expression Ahl al-Dhimmah replaced the Quranic designation of groups of non-Muslims, i.e. Christians and Jews, as Ahl al-Kitāb or “People of the Book”. The word *dhimmah* means conscience, i.e. the people of the Book are in the *dhimmah* of the Prophet. They did not have to go to wars that were considered as *jihād* wars, i.e. wars which aimed at spreading Islam. The exemption from military service and from going to war was closely related to the *jizyah* and is an important topic for the study of citizenship and military service during the period of decline of the Ottoman Empire, and also in the frame of Christian-Muslim relations in modern times.⁴ In this article, we will treat the development of this concept of the *jizyah* and the way in which it was levied throughout the Ottoman era.⁵

The exemption of the monks and the clergy from payment of the *jizyah* was sometimes ignored by the Ottoman authorities. Thus a document from Tripoli’s court of justice in 1103/1691 represents a request from the bishop of Tripoli, Mikhāyil, son of Ilyās Faraḥ, and the monk Ilyās al-Khūrī, son of Yūnis, to the governor of Tripoli, Muṣṭafā Pasha,⁶ in which they complained to the Sharī‘ah tribunal about the governor who required them to pay the *jizyah*. Among the victims of injustice cited in this complaint were all the poor monks of the churches and monasteries of the province of Tripoli. The document referred to them as poor and unable to earn a living.⁷ The governor acknowledged the accusation but assured them that, in demanding the *jizyah* from the monks, he was executing the orders he received from the Ottoman authorities in accordance with the *firmān* (decree) sent by the Sultan, which he read out during a session convened for this matter. The *firmān* specified that the *dhimmī* must pay the *jizyah* depending on their level of wealth. It added that it was because of their status as *dhimmīs* that he required them to pay the Quranic tax.

⁴ Ibid., 31.

⁵ Antoine Fattal, *Le statut légal des non-Musulmans en pays d’Islam*, Beirut: Imp. Catholique 1958, 266.

⁶ Colophon of the manuscript “Majmū‘ Mubārak” of the Patriarch of Antioch Makārius Ibn al-Za‘īm, British Library, no. 28.

⁷ Ibid.

The governor refused to believe that they were poor, and asked them to prove it. So Muslim witnesses from Tripoli intervened who, according to their names, had religious (*hājj*, *faqīh*, *sayyid*) and military functions (*āghā*, *shūbāshī*). They testified that the monks did not use to pay taxes like this *jizyah* since the days of the Prophet when, by agreement, they enjoyed such a protection by the Prophet; they added that they were poor and did not work, but living on alms given to them by the Christians of the district. The poor, they said, is like the ill, the paralytic and the insane, they cannot earn a living because they live apart and do not mix with people.⁸ This testimony was deemed legal by the Muslim *qāḍī* and a judgment (*ḥukm*) was issued by the court with a document being sent to the plaintiffs exempting them from paying the *jizyah*.⁹

Despite the initial laws exempting the monks from this tax, peculiar circumstances of wars and conflicts experienced by the city of Tripoli, and deficit in the public treasury of the Ottomans led local authorities to violate the Sharīʿah, and to impose this tax on monks and the clergy. The document also indicates that despite the weakness of the Christian communities at that time (late seventeenth century), their bishop was able to bring forward a complaint against the governor in a Muslim court, and that he could win the case through the testimony of Muslim personalities of the city.

Jizyah in the Eighteenth Century

The tax system was primarily based on the real estate or land tax. Concurrent to this tax, the population of Mount Lebanon was subjected to the personal tax mentioned previously, called capitation or *jizyah*. The principle of this tax was based on the Islamic Sharīʿah. As outlined above, the tax was paid by non-Muslims, Ahl al-Dhimmah, who were exempted from military service and protected by the Muslim state. Some historians recognized the existence of the *jizyah* as starting from the beginning of the 19th century onwards only. However, due to the administrative organization and the fact that the emir of Mount Lebanon provided, when necessary, a local army to support the governors of the provinces, the population of the Mountain did not pay this tax. This local army was regarded as a military contribution to the sultan. Therefore, Mount Lebanon was exempted from capitation.¹⁰

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Philippe and Farīd al-Khāzin, *al-Muqarrarāt al-siyāsiyyah wa-l-mufāwaḍāt al-duwaliyyah 1840-1860*, Beirut: Dār al-rāʾid al-lubnānī 1983, 86.

Capitation was to be paid by male adults. Women, minors, slaves, insane ones, and the poor were exempted. The monks of the monasteries were considered as poor and living on alms and benevolence, and they were generally exempted from payment of the *jizyah*.¹¹ This tax was leased and levied at the same time as the *mīrī* (tax on production), and the *multazim* was responsible for raising all taxes on behalf of the state at the same time. The government was not concerned with the internal matters of the leased provinces, as they were in the provinces that were directly under their control. It is in this sense that Volney, a French 18th/19th century traveler, observed that the tax of the *jizyah* was not raised in the districts where the *mīrī* tax was leased, as in the Maronite and the Druze areas.¹² The question of the *jizyah* in Mount Lebanon raised much discussion at the historical level as well as the political level.

The amount of the personal tax was sometimes lower, sometimes higher than that of the legal *jizyah*.¹³ For instance, the tax was paid by the inhabitants of the Matn before the battle of ʿAyn Dārā (1711). The resistance and the refusal of the wealthy Maronite Khāzin family to grant the *muqāṭaʿah* of Matn and Qātiʿ to the Abillamaʿ family led the latter to exempt the inhabitants of these districts from the personal tax (locally called *jāliya*) on the condition that they refused the authority of the Khāzins.¹⁴

This exemption did not include all the localities under the charge of the Abillamaʿ family. For instance, each inhabitant of Zahleh paid a personal tax of three piasters before 1750. It seemed that this tax was levied locally for the benefit of the *muqāṭaʿjis* and was not paid to the emir.¹⁵

This tax matter was even a problem for Aḥmad al-Jazzār¹⁶, the Ottoman pasha of Acre. He had informed the Porte that he had fought the emirs of the mountain and had been victorious. Satisfied with this result, the Ottomans then required from him to send them the *jizyah* paid by the Christians in 1790. Disconcerted by this new tax requirement, al-Jazzār requested the opinion of his Minister of Finance, Ḥayīm, whom he had imprisoned. The

¹¹ Ḥabīb al-Zayyāt, “Jawālī al-Masīḥiyyīn fī l-Islām”, *al-Mashriq* 41 (1947) 45.

¹² Constantin François de Volney, *Voyage en Syrie et en Égypte pendant les années 1783-1784 et 1785*, 2 vols., Paris: no publisher 1804, vol. 2, 332.

¹³ Toufic Touma, *Paysans et institutions féodales chez les Druzes et les Maronites du Liban du XVIIe siècle à 1914*, Beirut: Publications de l’Université Libanaise 1972, 644.

¹⁴ Maṣṣūr Ṭannūs al-Ḥattūnī, *Nubdhah tārikhiyyah fī l-muqāṭaʿah al-Kisrawāniyyah*, Beirut: Awraq Lubnāniyyah fī khidmat al-tārikh 1956, 10.

¹⁵ ʿIssa Iskandar al-Maʿlūf, *Tārikh madīnat Zahlah*, Zahle: Idārat jarīdat Zahlah al-fatāt 1984, 102.

¹⁶ “Ahmet Bey” or “Jezzar Pasha” **al-Jazzār** (1720-1804).

latter advised him to pay the sum required by the government from his own coffers and to inform the Porte the following year that all the Christians of Lebanon had converted to Islam. This way, capitation did not have any *raison d'être*. The chronicler reports to us that al-Jazzār followed this advice.¹⁷ This detail as reported by Mishāqā shows the ignorance as well as the lack of direct control of the Porte in territorial matters.

During the eighteenth century, there were several attempts to raise a personal tax in Mount Lebanon. In 1749, Emir Muḥim Maʿn tried to make each man pay one piaster, but the population refused and started to gather their forces to revolt. This refusal forced Emir Muḥim to give up his plan.¹⁸

The second attempt to impose the capitation as undertaken by Emir Yūsuf Shihāb also failed. In 1782, he asked his agents to levy a tax of two piasters on each male. Yet the payment of this tax was refused by the population. It is commonly known under the name of *shāshiyah*.¹⁹ In return for its payment, the taxpayers usually received a piece of gauze fabric which Christians used to attach to their turbans.²⁰ Yet, again, the payment of this tax also failed; it was refused by the population. However, it succeeded later on when the rise in the biddings of the tax of Mount Lebanon was required by al-Jazzār. This led the emirs to impose this new tax to bail out their treasury. Some historians indicate that the amount of this new tax was two piasters per male,²¹ but according to others, this tax was proportional to the wealth of the individual. The poorest paid 30 paras, and the monasteries, which were exempted, were to ensure the ammunition for the soldiers.²²

In 1793, this tax earned the Emirs Ḥaydar and Qaḥdān Shihāb 30,000 piasters.²³ In 1795, under Emir Bashīr II Shihāb, the capitation called *shāshiyah* was increased to three piasters. It was always accompanied by the payment of the *mīrī*. But it created a problem related to the estimation of the number of citizens.²⁴ In 1797, for example, Emir Bashīr imposed the *shāshiyah* of three piastres, but the notables disagreed on the number

¹⁷ Mikhāyil Mishāqā, *Kitāb mashhad al-ʿiyān bi-ḥawādith Sūriyā wa Lubnān*, Egypt (Miṣr): no publisher 1908, 59.

¹⁸ Polk, *South Lebanon*, 43.

¹⁹ al-Ḥattūnī, *Nubdhah*, 198.

²⁰ ʿIssa Iskandar al-Maʿlūf, *Dawānī l-Qutūf fī tārikh banī l-Maʿlūf*, Baʿabda: al-Maṭbaʿah al-ʿUthmāniyyah 1907-1908, 252.

²¹ Ibrāhīm al-Aswad, *Kitāb zakhāʿir Lubnān*, Baʿabda: no publisher 1910, 296.

²² Rufāyil Karāmah, *Maṣādir tārikhiyyah li-ḥawādith Lubnān wa-Sūriyā 1745 à 1800*, Beirut: Impr. Catholique, 1929, 126.

²³ ʿIssa Iskandar al-Maʿlūf, *Tārikh madīnat Zaḥlah*, 132.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 136.

of people who had to pay it, which led the emir to distribute the requested sum roughly among the villages for a period of 16 years; with time, this capitation reached a sum six times higher than the initial one.²⁵

Jizyah in the Nineteenth Century

Capitation, as a personal tax, was raised almost regularly during the beginning of the nineteenth century, and continued to be related to the personal income of the *muqāṭaʿjis* and the *wālīs*. Churchill, a British agent to Mount Lebanon, mentioned that this tax, which amounted to six to ten piasters, was levied by the Abillama^c emirs in al-Biqā^c and constituted part of the personal income of these emirs.²⁶

In 1807, the Ottoman Porte decided to impose a new tax in Mount Lebanon under the name of *kharāj*, arguing that the Lebanese people carried weapons only for their own defense. Emir Bashīr found a compromise with Sulaymān Pasha²⁷ by paying in compensation a sum of 300,000 piasters over an eight years period. It seemed that, by this solution, Emir Bashīr avoided the imposition or the precedent of the lifting of a personal tax by paying the sum of the *kharāj* independently.²⁸

On the local scale though, this tax was known under the name of *jawālī*, plural of *jāliyah*. It is mentioned in a text about an inhabitant of ʿAbay [south east of Beirut] who was exempted from the tax. This capitation was nine piasters and five paras, and it was recorded in the registers of the *muqāṭaʿjis* of the district. It was part of the *muqāṭaʿjis* income, and it enabled them to pay the wages of their servants.²⁹

Henri Guys, French consul in Aleppo, and later in Beirut, mentions a lower figure: he specified that this capitation rose to five piasters for a single person, and seven piasters for the married. Yet according to him, this *jizyah* was part of the whole tax paid by the population known under the name of *mīrī*, and it constituted fifteen to twenty five percent of their incomes.³⁰

²⁵ Rufāyil Karāmeh, *Maṣāḍīr tārikhiyyah*, 153.

²⁶ Charles Churchill, *Mount-Lebanon: A ten Years Residence from 1842-1852*, London, Saunders and Otley 1853, vol. 1, 96.

²⁷ He ruled over Beirut from 1831 to 1840.

²⁸ Polk, *South Lebanon*, 38.

²⁹ al-Ḥattūnī, *Nubdhah*, 543.

³⁰ Henri Guys, *Beyrouth et le Liban: Relation d'un séjour de plusieurs années dans ce pays*, 2 vols., Paris: no publisher 1850, 140.

Jizyah during the Egyptian Occupation (1832-1840)

During this period, the governor of Egypt occupied Bilād al-Shām with the military help of the above mentioned Emir Bashīr II Shihāb. In the middle of 1833, Muḥammad ‘Alī³¹, the *wālī* of Egypt, instituted a new tax known under the name of *fardah*, levied on all males aged 12 years and above. The historian Assad Rustum supposed that *fardah* is a deformation of the word *farīdah* (obligation).³² Ḥattūnī, a Maronite local historian, mentioned it under the name of *fardah* and reported what follows: “Although it was a personal tax, this capitation was proportional to the fortune of each one. It varied from 15 to 500 piasters, according to the social status of the individual. The population of the country was divided into 10 social categories.”³³ This tax, which was to represent the twelfth of the income, or annual profit, of each one, was imposed on all the inhabitants of Bilād al-Shām without reference to religion. It was not welcomed by Muslims because it equated them to the Christians.³⁴ It also represented an additional burden for the Christian villagers who were to pay the *mīrī* and the *jizyah* at the same time. Mishāqā gave the example of the inhabitants of Ḥāsbayyā whose cause he pleaded with the Egyptian governors in Damascus as a representative of Emir Sa‘d al-Dīn Shihāb. He encouraged other representatives to add their complaints regarding this matter to the Egyptian authorities. The efforts of Buṭrus Karāmah led to a decrease of the *fardah* paid by Mount Lebanon. The tax on the Lebanese people was fixed at an average of 50 piasters, whereas it was previously 100, payable by 40,000 people. The tax paid in al-Biqā‘ was to be the least across all Lebanon: 35 piasters. Mishāqā succeeded in negotiating a decrease to 30 piasters.³⁵

This arrangement which Buṭrus Karāmah managed to ratify freed the emirs, sheikhs and clergymen from the payment of the *fardah*.³⁶ It contradicted, to some extent, the distribution of the *fardah* according to social class. Initially, this capitation did not save the emirs and the sheikhs. Achille Laurent specified, in this context, that the mountain dwellers of lower classes were to pay 22 piasters, while those who were a little better-off paid 50

³¹ Muḥammad ‘Alī Pasha al-Mas‘ūd ibn Āghā (4 March 1769 – 2 August 1849).

³² As‘ad Rustum, *Bashīr bayn al-Ṣultān wa-l-‘Azīz, 1804-1814*, 2 vol., Beirut: al-Maktabah al-Būlusiyah 1988, 118.

³³ al-Ḥattūnī, *Nubdhah*, 264.

³⁴ Ferdinand Perrier, *La Syrie sous le règne de Mohammad Ali jusqu’en 1840*, Paris: no publisher 1842, 99.

³⁵ Mikhāyil Mishāqā, *Muntakhabāt min al-jawāb ‘alā iqtirāḥ al-aḥbāb*, Beirut: al-Maktabah al-Būlusiyah 1955.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

piasters. The sheikhs paid 150 piasters, and finally the emirs 400 piasters.³⁷ Despite all the complaints and objections formulated against it, this tax was regularly levied.³⁸ Like the other types of taxes (*mīrī*, *jizyah*), this tax was prone to an increase by Emir Bashīr. Indeed, it was collected several times; the *fardah*, with an average of 19 piasters per capita, was paid three or four times during the year.³⁹

The *fardah* tax brought about two million piasters to the coffers of the Egyptian government. Figures differ according to the sources and periods. Moore estimated that the income of *fardah* from Mount Lebanon in 1838-39 was 1,875,000 piasters, at an average of 50 piastres per person. However, a French report, written later, reported that towards the end of the reign of Emir Bashīr, 2,000,000 piasters came from the *fardah* tax.⁴⁰ The figures given by Guys were yet again different. According to him, the income due to *fardah* was up to 2,610,000 piasters which were paid by 58,000 taxpayers who, on average, paid 45 piasters each. These various evaluations of the income of *fardah* pertained to the end of the period of the Egyptian occupation. Initially, this tax was not that high though. In 1835, it was only 1,115,139 piasters.⁴¹

In fact, the collection of *fardah* presupposes knowing the number of the inhabitants subjected to this tax. This explains how differences in the evaluation of the income regarding *fardah* are partly due to different results of censuses which served as a basis for its estimation and which were carried out under the Egyptian government. Furthermore, different travelers and consuls during this period provided different estimates. For instance, two official censuses were carried out in this respect from 1833 to 1839.⁴² The first gave the figure of 30,000, and the second of 40,000 *fardah* payers. This last figure provided by Buṭrus Karāmah was the official figure adopted by the Egyptian government. These figures corresponded to those given by the English consul Moore, in 1838-39, who estimated that the *fardah* was paid in Mount Lebanon by 8000 Druses, 27,000 Christians, 1500 Shiites and 1000 Sunnites, or a total of 37,500 people. This figure is close to that given by Maʿlūf who estimated 38,000 taxpayers.⁴³ This evaluation

³⁷ Achille Laurent, *Relation historique des affaires de Syrie depuis 1840 jusqu'à 1842*, Paris: Gaume Frères 1846, 9.

³⁸ Polk, *South Lebanon*, 154.

³⁹ Perrier, *La Syrie*, 372.

⁴⁰ Polk, *South Lebanon*, 155-157.

⁴¹ Guys, *Beyrouth et le Liban*, vol. 2, 248.

⁴² Polk, *South Lebanon*, 156.

⁴³ Mishāqā, *Muntakhabāt*, 121 and ʿIssa Iskandar al-Maʿlūf, *Tārīkh madīnat Zaḥlah*, 247.

includes the number of males in each community as well as the number of people able to carry weapons in this community including the emirs, sheikhs and the clergy. Thus we have:

30,000 Maronites, 20,000 of whom were able to carry weapons.

9000 Greek Catholics, 7000 of whom were able to carry weapons.

7000 Greek Orthodox, 5000 of whom were able to carry weapons.

10,000 Druses, 8000 of whom were able to carry weapons.

1000 Sunnites, 700 of whom were able to carry weapons.

3000 Shiites, 2000 of whom were able to carry weapons.

These estimates handed down by Perrier and Guys exceed the local censuses. Guys said that capitation in Mount Lebanon was paid by 58,000 taxpayers, whereas Perrier estimated twice as many. According to him, 110,313 capitations were deducted from Mount Lebanon in 1839 and 1840. The Maronites paid 77,589 *fardah* taxes and other Christian denominations 8029.⁴⁴ The number of Christians subjected to the *fardah* rose to 85,618 according to him, whereas Moore, at the same time, estimated that 27,000 Christians were paying this tax.⁴⁵

Also, there were multiple levies exerted on the *fardah*. Emir Bashīr kept a part of the collected personal tax for himself. Achille Laurent estimated that Emir Bashīr alone was responsible for the fast rise of the taxes: “Muḥammad ‘Alī received from the mountain only one tax while the emir established new ones each year under different pretexts in such a way that during the last years, the population of the different denominations was burdened with more than 18 varieties of charges.”⁴⁶

Revenues from taxes (*fardah* and *mīrī*) imposed in the mountain rose to 9 million piasters, roughly 3,250,000 piastres for the *mīrī*, 2,000,000 piasters for the *fardah*, and an additional 1,000,000 piasters coming from the tax on the herds, on the soap factories, mills and other. Hence the total of 2,750,000 piastres was collected as *avanas* and extortions from the people of the mountain.⁴⁷

From this sum, only 2,400,000 piasters were given to the Egyptian government. The emirs’ revenues were estimated at 5 millions piasters, approximately twenty five times the revenue mentioned by Burckhardt in 1810.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Perrier, *La Syrie*, 372.

⁴⁵ Dominique Chevallier, *La société du Mont-Liban à l’époque de la révolution industrielle en Europe*, Paris: Geuthner 1971, 112.

⁴⁶ Laurent, *Relation historique*, 9.

⁴⁷ Polk, *South Lebanon*, 157.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 157.

Jizyah during the Qā'immaqāmiyyah (1845-1860)

We get an idea of what certain villages paid through the observations made by David Urquhart [a delegate of the British House of Commons]: according to him, the village of Shwayr in the Matn paid a tax of 8000 piasters of which 4500 were personal taxes. Batrūn paid 10,000 piasters, including 2500 as a personal tax. Ḥāsbayyā paid 150,000 piasters, including 20,000 as a personal tax. Jizzīn and the surrounding 43 villages paid 45,000 piasters.⁴⁹

The personal tax also resulted in a lot of protests from the Christians. Moreover, it was the first time that they clearly expressed their resentment regarding this tax. In a petition sent by emirs and Lebanese notables, the personal tax, which was also called *al-a'nāq* (the necks), was also mentioned.⁵⁰

According to the signatories, this tax had been imposed on the Christians of the Ottoman Empire for the protection of their lives and their goods, but the Christians of the Mountain had never needed expenses for protection. They had always been armed to defend and help the Ottoman governors in repressing the populations which revolted against the authority of the sultan. These notables claimed that for this reason the Ottomans had hitherto exempted them from *kharāj* and to ascertain this, it was enough to refer to the tax registers. It seems that this personal tax, levied in the mountain, at the end of the seventeenth century and during the first half of the nineteenth century, was intended to fill the coffers of notables and of emirs.⁵¹

The refusal to pay the *jizyah* was not the position taken by all Christians. It is interesting in this context to quote the opinion of Mīkhāyil Mishāqā. According to him, it would have been unthinkable for the Christians not to pay the *jizyah*. He gave two reasons for that: a religious reason stating that Christ himself paid this tax to Caesar, and another reason, which he qualified as "*de principe*", which states that for the Christians, not to pay the *jizyah* would have given a legal and valid reason for the Sultan to fight them.⁵²

As for the value of this tax, it seemed that it was 10 piasters per person. But effectively, when it was levied, it rose to 20 piasters per male resident.⁵³

⁴⁹ David Urquhart, *The Lebanon: A History and a Diary*, 2 vols., London: no publisher 1860, vol. 2, 20, 53, 360, 238.

⁵⁰ Philippe and Farīd al-Khāzin, *al-Muqarrarāt al-siyāsiyyah*, 55.

⁵¹ Philippe and Farīd al-Khāzin, *al-Muqarrarāt al-siyāsiyyah*, 86.

⁵² Mishāqā, *Muntakhabāt*, 155.

⁵³ Urquhart, *Lebanon*, vol. 2, 238.

For a certain family living in a village in al-Matn, the personal tax was estimated at 40 piasters, whereas the *mīrī* was at 75 piasters. The expenses of this family were estimated at 1575 piasters. The sum of the taxes – 115 piasters – represented thus 7.3 % of this family's expenses.⁵⁴

Jizyah during the Mutaṣarrifiyyah (1860-1915)

In 1882, a new tax was established: the tax of the quarter *majīdī* (*al-rub^c al- majīdī*). The Administrative Council of the Mutaṣarrifiyyah of Mount Lebanon levied a tax of $\frac{1}{4}$ *majīdī* on each taxpayer to build roads. This tax, having been estimated to be insufficient, was again fixed at 20 piasters per taxpayer. The amount of this tax reached 953,586 piasters in 1892.⁵⁵

The personal tax was fixed starting from a primary census which estimated the male taxpayers at 99,834 persons. Each one was to pay a tax of 8 piasters and 30 paras. The total amount of this tax was then fixed at 8,735,475 piasters. In spite of the increase in population, the number of the taxpayers who had to pay the personal tax was not modified.⁵⁶

We will not tackle the problem of the number of inhabitants and its evaluation, but we will note that the different evaluations and censuses carried out during the period of the Mutaṣarrifiyyah (1861-1914) provided different data and contradictions for they came from sources of divergent interests and processes.⁵⁷

The working mechanism of the Mutaṣarrifiyyah raised many problems, related on one hand to the political representation, and on the other to the budget and the levying of the tax. These same problems had certain relevance after the last civil war in Lebanon. The Maronites were represented in the Mutaṣarrifiyyah council by two members. This represented a disadvantage with regards to the adoption of certain decisions. In the opinion of General Ducrot as reported by Rochemonteix: "The council thus made up had to decide on all the great general questions, tax, police force... etc, it was obvious that the interests of the Christian majority were entirely at the mercy of the Muslim minority and that in any business, the governor, named by the Porte, and dependent on it, was certain to group a higher number of voices against the Maronites".⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Urquhart, *Lebanon*, vol. 1, 389.

⁵⁵ al-Aswad, *Kitāb zakhāʾir Lubnān*, 111.

⁵⁶ Ismāʿīl Ḥaqqī, *Lubnān mabāḥith ʿilmiyyah wa-ijtimāʿiyyah*, Beirut: Lebanese University Publications 1970, 625.

⁵⁷ Vital Cuinet, *Syrie, Liban et Palestine: Géographie administrative, statistique, descriptive et raisonnée*, Fascicule 3, Paris: no publisher 1896, 294.

⁵⁸ Camille Rochemonteix, *Le Liban et l'expédition française en Syrie (1860-1861)*, Paris: Auguste Picard 1921, 238.

The position of the *mutaşarrif* towards the Druze and the Maronites was ambiguous; he could not support them without upsetting the other minorities (Sunnis, Shiites, Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholics). The *mutaşarrif* had thus to choose between a conflict with the minority voting for the tax, and a fight with the majority (the Maronites) that pay it.⁵⁹

The denominational distribution of administrative posts continued to present problems of claims and conflicts between the communities. At the time of the *Mutaşarrifiyyah*, this problem was felt very strongly. 5/6 of the tax to the Porte was paid by the Maronites, who were then taxed to support other religious minorities. For example, the Shiites, whose number did not exceed 3,000, had 59 civil servants and required 708 purses as salaries, whereas the whole of their community was taxed only with 70 purses.⁶⁰ These figures, even if they do not correspond exactly to the data provided by Aswad, reflect a certain state of mind and a rancor, which continues to the present.

The situation regarding personal taxation was different in the cities. This is documented in the bishopric and patriarchal archives as people who paid these taxes were listed in official registers. We can also find documents related to the *jizyah* payment in the Sharīah courts located in the cities. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire launched a series of reforms known as *Tanzīmāt*, which aimed at modernizing the Empire and enable it to resist disintegration. These reforms concerned primarily the status of non-Muslim minorities. During this period, the civil and political emancipation of many Eastern Christians took place. The *Hatt-i Sharīf* of *Gülhane*, promulgated in 1839, established civic equality between Christians and Muslims. It stated that “the national institutions should, from now on, guarantee a perfect security to our subjects concerning their lives, honor and properties. The sovereign concessions are given to all with no discriminating as to their religion or sect.”⁶¹ A more equitable fiscal reform was promised. In 1856, the *Hatt-i Hümayun* asserted the equality of *dhimmīs* and Muslims, with regard to justice, military recruitment, and taxes. Political rights were also granted to non-Muslim communities. Jews and Christians obtained voting rights for communal and provincial councils, freedom of religious worship, the ability to construct new churches or restore old ones, and access to public function. Nevertheless a contradiction

⁵⁹ Gustave Alaux, “Le Liban et Dawoud Pacha”, *Revue des Deux Mondes* 4 (1865), 150-175, 152.

⁶⁰ Rochemonteix, *Le Liban et l'expédition française*, 236.

⁶¹ Engelhardt, Edward, *La Turquie et le Tanzimat*, 2 vols, Paris: Cotillon 1882-1884, vol. 1, 64.

arose. While the reforms advocated equality, fragmentation was authorized in the *millets*. The nineteenth century witnessed the crumbling of the unity of Christian communities and the consolidation of their individual particularities.⁶² While traditional patriarchates remained loyal to the Ottoman Porte, the new elite, encouraged by the Western powers, tried to claim the equality of all subjects in the Ottoman Empire and the maintenance of the old *millet* privileges simultaneously. Some researchers consider that the notion of *millet* did not even exist before the nineteenth century and that the reforms undertaken by the Ottoman Porte introduced the tendency of fragmentation and of the splitting of the communities into *millets*.⁶³ Others tried to prove that the *millet* system preceded these reforms and that the *millet* concept, dating from immemorial times, designated minor communities, and was even used in the Koran.⁶⁴

According to the Hatt-i Hümayun of 1856, these *millets* formally kept on enjoying their traditional privileges, in the internal organization of their churches, but the sultan requested them to reform their temporal administration. Assemblies, elected in each community, had to participate in its administration. These internal reforms were bound to improve the traditional and antiquated *millet* structures so as to adapt them to modernity and to the new Ottoman State under construction. In the second half of the nineteenth century the *millets* were reorganized under pressure of the lay notables, who wished to take over the administration of the communities' *waqf* revenues and, especially, their schools, which had by then acquired an unprecedented importance.⁶⁵

Members of the *majlis* (the administrative council) were community notables and important merchants, landlords and financiers from the city. It was mainly them who paid the largest amounts of military taxes (*badal ʿaskariyyah*) and real estate taxes known as *wirko*. The Christians as citizens had to serve and participate, together with the Muslims, in the defense of the Empire. But these new reforms did not please everybody. Christians

⁶² C. Mayeur Jaouen, "La Renaissance dans les Églises d'Orient à la fin de l'époque ottomane : les 19^e et 20^e siècles", in Joseph Abu Nahra, Habib Bader and Souad Slim (eds.), *Christianity through its History in the Orient*, Beirut: MECC, 2001, 751-772.

⁶³ Benjamin Braude, "Foundation of Myths of the Millet System", in: Braude and Lewis (eds.), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, vol. 1, New York, HOLMES & MEIER PUBLISHERS, INC., 1982, 69-89.

⁶⁴ Vincenzo Poggi, "Les Chrétiens en Orient durant la seconde période ottomane (l'établissement du régime des millets)", in Joseph Abu Nahra, Habib Bader and Souad Slim (eds.), *Christianity through its History in the Orient*, Beirut: MECC 2001, 655-671.

⁶⁵ Mayeur Jaouen, "La Renaissance".

and Muslims had to pay a tax in return for their non-participation in the army. It was this new *jizyah* paid by the new citizens that was called *badal ʿaskariyyah*.

Conclusion

The *jizyah* as charged in Mount Lebanon during the Ottoman period was a discriminatory practice with regards to Christians, but was not as lower as for the Christians of the main towns in Syria. There, the *jizyah* was levied on each person individually. The taxed *dhimmīs* were specifically named in the registers of justice of these cities. In Mount Lebanon, on the other hand, the *jizyah* had become a tax liability paid as an added value to the multitude of taxes imposed on the residents.

The concepts of citizenship and equality introduced by the Ottoman reforms were supposed to put an end to any discrimination or segregation. Were these reforms imposed at a very early stage, or were the people to whom they were addressed not aware of their aims or their necessity? The painful episodes experienced by Christians in the wake of the disintegration of the Empire (persecutions, massacres, displacement of populations and similar) led them to reconsider the *jizyah* as being rather tolerant and more merciful. The reality is that this notion of citizenship, linked to the military conscription, was denied by the Christians themselves (especially in Lebanon) and that despite the injustice of *jizyah* and the discrimination they suffered, the Christians of the Ottoman Empire and Lebanon found a way to prosper economically and to increase demographically.

Re-writing the Self: Addressing a Culture of Tolerance through Literature

IBRAHIM A. EL-HUSSARI

This article examines an anthology of narrative works written by widely-read modern and contemporary Palestinian and Israeli novelists, who, in re-writing the self, seem to have produced images of who they actually are in a fundamentally asymmetric power struggle over space and time, identity and cultural politics. The article looks at these issues in works written by Ghassan Kanafani and Anton Shammas as Palestinian writers, on the one hand; and works written by Amos Oz and David Grossman, as Israeli writers, on the other. By trying to write the self anew, those writers – whose views do not necessarily dovetail – sketch representative characters whose ambivalence is not only reflected in one’s own mirror but also in the mirror held by the “Other”. Focusing on the various images featuring in these narratives, this article explores the area where those Israeli and Palestinian writers seem to be sharing the shades of tolerance in a sensitive region in which only conflicting ideologies have so far flourished.

Introduction

Since the dawn of human history and the formation of rival communities, narratives, whether communicated orally or in written form, have been a medium of expression by means of which groups of homogeneous culture often construct their self-narration and place it in a historical context for perpetuation. Whether self-narration is done overtly or covertly, it often obliterates the other side of the story that might contradict and undermine that single-handed version. In the modern and contemporary Middle East, where the conflict is sharpest between Israelis and Palestinians, and in the absence of a culture of tolerance from the region, narratives told by representative writers from both sides tend to accommodate a wide range of topics dealing with hot issues, on top of which come identity, history and homeland. This article, however, does not pretend to address a literary solution to the seemingly irreparable conflict in question. It simply

tries to approach various narratives written by modern and contemporary Palestinian and Israeli writers in whose works key-characters' discourses reveal who they are and how they accept or reject the 'Other' as they spell out complex issues related to the ownership of land, history and identity in an atmosphere of racial, religious and cultural discrimination. This study is guided by what tolerance, intolerance and discrimination might mean in the literature reviewed.

What is Tolerance?

The etymology of "discrimination" and "tolerance" serves the linguistic face value of the terms rather than what they actually mean when contextualized. The two terms, though defined as different, are also defined as antonyms in that negative connotations of discrimination at any level are placed against loose words like fairness, acceptance, endurance, and forbearance.¹ It is only when contextualized that words like acceptance and endurance, for instance, go under repressive tolerance, which is not a virtue at all, for the concept of tolerance as researched so far implies positive connotation in terms of human values. It is the task of the intellectual to break the concreteness of oppression and discrimination in order to open the mental space in which a closed society like that of Israel can be recognized for what it is and what it does, not for what its founders, and a major part of the cynical Western discourse, claim it to be, namely the only democracy in the Middle East. Edward Said and Christopher Hitchens clarify how great Israel's valence is in the Western public life and institutions.² Also, Noam Chomsky³ and Ilan Pappé⁴, two renowned Jewish and Western intellectuals, have labeled Israel's democracy "ethnic". In my view, only in a consensual state, where all citizens are represented and viewed as equal, does the term democracy make sense. Only then, that is, would tolerance, as a human virtue, encompass all the positive connotations it fosters. Words like endurance, acceptance, silence and resignation, if viewed in the abstract, are not only neutral but also hollow, meaningless, and even absurd. As the concept of tolerance assumes and encourages positive attitude, behavior, and action, these

¹ Hans Oberdiek, *Tolerance between Forbearance and Acceptance*, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield 2001.

² Edward Said and Christopher Hitchens, eds., *Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question*, London: Verso 2001, 2-3.

³ Noam Chomsky, *Failed States: The Abuse of Power and the Assault on Democracy*, New York: Metropolitan Books 2006.

⁴ Ilan Pappé, *Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, Oxford: Oneworld Publications 2006.

cannot be maintained without toleration, the set of laws enforced when needed to fortify the value of tolerance. Not entirely so in Israel. The Palestinians in Israel, apparently, live beyond the pale of citizenry and political life, much less as secure owners of their own land and national heritage. Chomsky describes how the Palestinians “silently endured brutality, torture, degradation, and robbery of their lands and resources.”⁵ Yet, in a changing world the locus of tolerance/intolerance cannot stay fixed. In many of the Israeli literary narratives produced from the 1970s onwards, the “Other”, sketched as the Palestinian, seems to help define who the Jewish characters are in terms of who they are not. In these narratives, the ‘Other’ seems to have ceased to be the perpetual ‘Other’. The “Other” has become a cultural being whose existence cannot be nullified or simply dismissed as alien or non-existent.

Recent research⁶ in the fields of political philosophy, social sciences and law has pinned down and illustrated several forms and types of tolerance and discrimination across modern and contemporary cultures. However, the mechanism of defining the terms in the reality of lived experience is not well understood or tolerated due to differences in the one culture, much more in diverse cultures. Philosophers can only interpret the terms and extend their concepts but cannot replace actual experience. In philosophy, the concept of tolerance wavers between its being a human virtue or a human value. In fact, the concept of tolerance gains meaning at large when it is contextualized and introduced into public discourse. It is then that words take on new meaning and significance. Otherwise, tolerance would simply “occupy the moral space between mere forbearance and full acceptance.”⁷

In legal terms, Ramsey Clark points out that “[i]t is imperative that clear definitions of all fundamental rights of people be clearly inscribed in international law, including economic rights which are most basic to human need and on which other rights are dependent, and rights to freedom from military aggression by a super power or its surrogates.”⁸

Clark addresses the issue of tolerance within an international context to be observed by member states. In the same vein, Marcuse says that tolerance “is an end in itself only when it is truly universal”, and that “if the universal

⁵ Chomsky, *Failed States*, 185.

⁶ Oberdiek, *Tolerance*, 103.

⁷ Edward Said, Noam Chomsky, and Ramsey Clark, *Acts of Aggression: Policing Rogue States*, New York: Seven Series Press 1999, 82.

⁸ Said, Chomsky, and Clark, *Acts of Aggression*, 69.

conditions do not prevail, the conditions of tolerance are loaded.”⁹ In a legal system based on justice, equal citizenship should be protected by the constitution that only sustains tolerance as a societal value. There is nothing called pure tolerance, for it is abstract and passive, and as such it protects the already established machinery of discrimination. However, as Israel calls itself a Jewish state, thus ignoring its multi-religious and multi-ethnic society, religion does pose a threat to the legal concept of toleration. As a state, Israel simply violates its own neutrality by nursing religious intolerance even when it claims it does not. This extends effectively to all aspects of life, including the legal and the educational systems through which the state impresses itself on the minds of its Jewish majority, more especially the new immigrants, as the protector of the Jewish exclusive right of return, their myths and legends, exemplary figures, celebratory occasions, and memorial rituals. Even the Hebrew language, as the prevailing cultural space used by the citizens of Israel, becomes a territorial ownership that should not be used by non-Jewish trespassers or strangers when it comes to the cultural product of the state.¹⁰

In short, tolerance does not seem to escape shortcomings in an atmosphere of animosity, racial discrimination, religious intolerance, and conflicting ideologies. Tolerance and its limits are determined, in part at least, on the grounds of the power struggles, where the narratives produced are likely to mirror the various cultural groups making the complex society that is modern-day Israel. As post-modern and post-colonial literature tends to demystify myths and what they breed, it also tends to push to the fore images of the self in the on-going process of shaping and reshaping the concept of identity within the dynamics of power relations. Battles fought over space and time figure prominently in Jewish and Palestinian narratives as part of their struggle to remain in history.

Narratives to Propagate the Self

Many forms of self-presentation place emphasis on the process of individuation; that is, the individual is believed to construct his/her internal world almost single-handedly. However, narrative art as a means of shaping people’s perspectives on their lives tends to construct and reconstruct stories of cultural identity, which remains so remarkably stable. Oftentimes, the

⁹ Herbert Marcuse, “Repressive Tolerance”, in Robert Paul Wolff, ed., *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*, Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press 1965, 28.

¹⁰ *Infra*, see the various reactions of some of the Israeli intelligentsia to the Palestinian narratives written in Hebrew, such as those by Amos Oz, David Grossman, Avraham Yehoshua, and Ronit Matalon.

experiences told are part of a larger story of a whole people, the Palestinians, whose common history, culture, aspirations and dreams have constantly been under-presented, misrepresented or dimmed by time. Perceived within this scope, such stories are also addressed to the outside world to gain understanding and garner support for the “cause” they endorse.

Modern Palestinian Narratives

The modern Palestinian novel appeared with the publication of Ghassan Kanafani's *Rijāl fī l-Shams* (Men in the Sun) in 1956. It is a tragedy without a tragic hero. It is the story of three Palestinian refugees of different age groups (symbolically three generations) who accept to be smuggled inside an empty water-carrying cistern across the Iraqi-Kuwaiti border in pursuit of a decent living. Helplessly waiting for the slow bureaucratic clearance at the Kuwaiti border, the three men perish inside the cistern under the scorching sun of August. Nonchalantly, the driver drives the lorry into the desert and pulls over to a garbage heap where he strips the three corpses of their personal possessions, including their identification papers. In an attempt to shirk and shift responsibility for their cheap death and mass punishment, the smuggler blames it on the dead bodies for not having knocked on the metallic walls of the white-hot water-tank: “Why didn't you knock on the sides of the tank? Why didn't you say anything?”¹¹

The association between the tightly-closed water tank and the Palestinian refugee camp as an enclosure does not lend itself to further interpretation. Kanafani's ingenious blend of the symbolic and the realistic does save the tale from falling into the documentary, as he sacrifices neither of the two in the artist who compels the Palestinian refugees to voice themselves and seek other possibilities before they are ambushed, as individuals seeking personal gains, and thrown on a desert garbage heap as nobody.

In his second novel, *Mā tabaqqā la-kum*¹², Kanafani creates a young would-be hero, Hamid, who, out of personal despair and family disgrace, chooses to run away from his refugee home in a desperate attempt to reunite with his already displaced mother in the West Bank. It is the story of a brother and sister living in Gaza as refugees and separated from their mother, also a refugee living in the West Bank.¹³ The story illuminates the

¹¹ Ghassan Kanafani, *Rijāl fī l-shams* (Men in the Sun), London: Heinemann 1956, 56.

¹² Ghassan Kanafani, *Mā tabaqqā la-kum* (All That's Left to You), Austin, Texas: Center for Middle Eastern Studies 1966.

¹³ Part of Palestine, not occupied by Israel then, but had been annexed to Jordan since 1953.

inextricable issues of family and land, and the rage over their loss. Feeling ashamed of his elder sister's sexual disgrace by Zakaria, a Palestinian collaborator, Hamid reluctantly accepts to marry off his pregnant sister to the collaborator for no dowry, and decides to cross the Naqab Desert for a family reunion. It is in the desert, which Kanafani personifies as a character, that Hamid feels at home and where he accidentally ambushes an Israeli border guard. At the same moment, his sister Mariam recounts her disgrace and realizes that her husband is none but the enemy of the people. Separated by age and distance, Hamid and Mariam are now united in a common struggle: one facing the enemy within, the other the enemy without.

Interestingly enough, however, as the story progresses at a quicker pace, Hamid and the hostage Israeli soldier seem to be going around in a vicious circle. Only then does Hamid try to initiate a "conversation" with his hostage, who does not understand Arabic and remains suspicious of Hamid's intention: "Perhaps you only know Hebrew, but that doesn't matter. But really, isn't it amazing that we should meet so dramatically here in this emptiness, and then find that we can't communicate?"¹⁴

In light of the fundamentally asymmetric power struggle between the Palestinians and the Israelis before 1967, Hamid's attempt to start a dialogue with the Israeli soldier would have been considered ineffective, but not in the least futile. In *Mā tabaqqā la-kum*, Kanafani scores an advantage over all earlier Palestinian narratives as regards the self-portrayal produced as well as the moment of truth that culminates in the face-to-face encounter between Palestinian natives and immigrant Jewish settlers, and in the missed chance for dialogue.

With Anton Shammas, an Israeli Arab Palestinian novelist, the ball is kept rolling but this time it is moved further into the Israeli circle of intelligentsia, particularly those men and women of letters whose role in shaping part of the Israeli popular culture cannot go unnoticed. His novel *Arabesques* (1986) is "a Palestinian tale in Hebrew letters"¹⁵ and "a text written in the language of the conquerors."¹⁶ Addressed to the Hebrew-speaking readers in the first place, the tale places Israeli liberal doves in an uneasy position, for it "questions their cultural assumptions and expectations."¹⁷ Defining his position as

¹⁴ Kanafani, *Mā tabaqqā la-kum*, 35.

¹⁵ Anton Shammas, *Arabeskot* [1966] (*Arabesques*), Tel Aviv, Am-Oved, trans. by Vivian Eden, London: Perennial Library 1989.

¹⁶ Hanan Hever, *Producing the Modern Canon: Nation-Building and Minority Discourse*, New York and London: New York University Press 2002, 176.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

author of and character in the tale, Shammass harbors no clear plans as to who he really is, for he tries to present his identity as a hybrid product of a de facto complex situation. He stands between a personal memory recollected from oral tales about his origin as an Arab Palestinian, and a futuristic vision he is trying to crystallize as a non-Jewish citizen of Israel.

In an interview with Daliyah Amit, and perhaps in response to the Israeli critic and novelist A. B. Yehoshua, who advises him to leave Israel for the future Palestinian state where he could realize his Palestinian identity fully, Shammass says, “[w]hat I’m trying to do is to un-Jew the Hebrew language ... to bring it back to its semantic origins, back to its place.”¹⁸ Un-Jewing the Hebrew language would simply mean breaking one leg of the tripod upon which the Zionist project rests. As laid down by Herzl and other Jewish leaders, Zionist nationalism interlocks religion, language, and homeland.

Arabesques invited much criticism in Israel, not only by Israeli critics who saw it as a non-Jewish narrative undermining their national assumptions, but also by Israeli writers who feature in the novel as characters debating with Shammass about his using Hebrew to write a non-Hebrew story. Moderate liberal writers, like

Amos Oz and David Grossman, responded as follows:

“I think of [the publication] as a triumph, not for the Israeli society, but for the Hebrew language. If the Hebrew language is becoming attractive for a non-Jewish Israeli to write in, then we have arrived! [...] Invited into the language, the guest [Shammass] already begins the process of conquering.”¹⁹

Deriving its name and structure from arabesque, an elaborate and fanciful design of twisted shapes, geometrical figures, and other, the novel is a search for identity in two parts, each of which hardly informs the other. The first part, recalling the author’s family, is history retrieved for honesty of record; the second part recording the author’s journey to the United States, as a participant in a cultural activity, is an attempt to redefine his present ambivalent identity through debate. Still in the eyes of other characters, Shammass is a “sample Arab”, to whom Yehoshua Bar-On, an Israeli writer and character in the second part of the story, offers salvation through the Hebrew language which he refers to as a sanctified territory that cannot be transgressed: “My Arab will build his confused tower on my space, in the language of grace. That is his only possible salvation.”²⁰

¹⁸ Daliya Amit, “Re’ayon im Anton Shammass” (An Interview with Anton Shammass), *Proza* (1988), 73-78.

¹⁹ Amos Oz and David Grossman, quoted in Reoven Snir, “Hebrew as the Language of Grace: Arab-Palestinian Writers in Hebrew”, *Prooftexts* 15 (1995) 4, 163-83.

²⁰ Shammass, *Arabesques*, 167.

Shammas does not continue writing the self in the second part of *Arabesques*; instead, he dissolves the self into the animation of the story of others. For Shammas, the Hebrew language, as a cultural space, should not exclude or discriminate against its non-Jewish users. In this respect, Shammas does not stand alone. Mahmoud Darwish, a renowned Palestinian poet, sees Hebrew as “my language of love and friendship [...] the language of my childhood memories.”²¹

Trying to compromise his position vis-à-vis the question of identity, Shammas does not seem to have garnered support for using the Hebrew language as a vehicle of the minority discourse. Renouncing his Arab identity and hoping to liberate his Israeli identity from its “Jewishness”, he seems to have positioned himself in a No-Man’s land, for “[o]nce again, I find myself standing at the entrance of the big gate. My life followed the path of a winding arabesque that has led me to the very same place where I began my journey.”²²

By appropriating the Hebrew language as a common cultural space between the Jewish majority and the Palestinian minority to serve an imaginative solution of identity, Shammas admits that he has adamantly transgressed a Jewish territory. His endeavor seems to have been provocative enough even to those Israeli doves who pretend that the Jewish Israelis, alone, are the owners of Hebrew as the national language of Israel. His attempt, however, cannot be dismissed as meaningless. He is fighting his battle on the same ground the Jewish Israelis claim it is theirs; and using their Hebrew language to make a point about identity and citizenry, Shammas is viewed as a conqueror of the Jewish sanctity in which none is allowed to enter. Although identity is not a subject to be compromised, Shammas takes the risk of doing that, testing the tolerance of the Israeli liberal doves whose reaction turns out to be ironically hawkish.

Jewish-Israeli Narratives

In the arena of re-writing the self through narrative discourse, the Palestinians do not stand alone. The Jewish Israelis, gradually facing the paradoxes of their ethno-cultural divide, unforeseen by Zionism upon the inception of the State, have also started to produce some realistic narratives that rarely echo the earlier Hebrew romantic tales feeding on myth and legend, but they hardly bypass the Holocaust memory. However, engaged

²¹ Mahmoud Darwish, “Interview with Hilit Yeshurun” (in Hebrew), *Chadarim* 23 (1996) 3, 194-95.

²² Shammas, *Arabesques*, 203.

in re-writing the self they have long re-invented, as well as presenting the city, the landscape and other domestic issues, they simply find themselves not only questioning the growing pluralism of the State,²³ but also running into the Palestinian as an existing historical reality. The Palestinian, now viewed as a less shadowy figure than ever before, is oftentimes depicted as a big part of their existential problem. This was not the case in earlier Hebrew narratives where the non-Jew Arab character, not the Palestinian, would be sketched as a grotesque, nightmarish villain without a cause, about whom horrible stories are concocted and against whom heroic battles are fought and won so easily.²⁴

It should be noted that the shift in self-representation started to emerge in the 1960s but took shape in the 1970s, most clearly in the narratives of the so-called dovish liberals, to use Chomsky's words, such as Amos Oz, David Grossman, Avraham Bulli Yehoshua, Sami Mikhail, Ronit Matalon, and others. This generation of writers came into prominence after the creation of the State of Israel. In most of the narratives of this generation, Arab characters figure as bereaved, miserable and lonely; and Jewish characters figure as dissatisfied, alien and melancholic. In his short and long narratives, whose plots mostly feature the conflict with Palestinians, Oz would rather go for a Chekhovian and not a Shakespearean solution to the tragic conflict. That is, he would devise a solution in the form of a "clenched teeth compromise where at the end everybody is unhappy but alive."²⁵

In his semi-autobiographical book, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, a saga epic in scope and filtered through the omniscient eye of the narrator, Oz recounts his parents' "journey" from Europe and the Holocaust and his birth in Jerusalem in 1939 under the British Mandate of Palestine, up to the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. Yet "the only journey from which you don't always come back empty-handed is the journey inside yourself."²⁶ This reminds us of Marlow's journey in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), at the end of which moral victory is not pronounced

²³ Differences among the Jewish immigrant settlers refer to Ashkenazi, Sephardic, and Mizrahi groups.

²⁴ Reference is made to "Hate Literature" in form of popular detective stories, *Hassamba*, cf. Tamar Meroz, "Israel's Hate Literature for Children", trans. from Hebrew by Israel Shahak as "The Non-Jew in the Jewish State: A Collection of Documents", *Ha'aretz* Weekly Supplement (September 20, 1975), 8-27.

²⁵ Elizabeth Fansworth, "Interview with Amos Oz: Coping with Conflict", accessed on March 2, 2007, *Online News* (January 23, 2003); see http://www.org/newshour/bbc/middle_east/html.

²⁶ Amos Oz, *Sipour al-Ahave Vehoshekh* (A Tale of Love and Darkness), trans. from Hebrew by Nicholas de Lange, London: Vintage 2005, 302.

through confession, but passed to us ironically through a whisper. Oz, so it seems, takes a daring step and makes a confession. The non-linear narrative, which waxes and wanes through various themes, tries to glue together a myriad of vignettes and episodes in which a lot of key-personalities and historic events figure as part of the history of modern-day Israel. Feeling uneasy about the Zionist dream shattering, Oz chooses to uncover the unpleasant experiences of his childhood and adulthood – having been an eyewitness to the fall of the house of his own family and beyond, including the painful relations between Arabs and Jews. Sixty years old when he wrote the book, Oz looks back in anger on his childhood memories and comes up with conflicting emotions about who he was in that period of time. For instance, his Russian father and Polish mother “read books in German and English, and they presumably dreamed in Yiddish. But the only language they taught me was Hebrew. May be they feared that a knowledge of languages would expose me too to the blandishments of Europe, that wonderful, murderous continent.”²⁷

In another place, Oz retains the collective memory of Diaspora Jewry in Europe and elsewhere to justify the defensive position of the Israeli immigrant nation: “The worldatlarge was far away, attractive, marvelous, but to us it was dangerous and threatening. It didn’t like the Jews. Out there, in the world, all the walls were covered with graffiti: “Yids, go back to Palestine”, so we came back to Palestine, and now the worldatlarge shouts at us: “Yids, get out of Palestine.”²⁸

Feigning total ignorance of the rules of the bloody game taking place around him and across the Holy Land during the British Mandate and after, and leaving his parents’ home for a Kibbutz to join the Zionist pioneers who built the Jewish state on the ruins of the Palestinian villages and farmland, Oz, having consciously renounced the original family name “Klausner,” records that complicity regretfully.

“In a word, I was like that fool who had learnt how to advance the king’s pawn two squares, and did so without hesitation, but after that had no idea at all about the game of chess, not even the names of the pieces, and how they moved. Lost!”²⁹

Shyly condemning the atrocities between Arabs and Jews, and moved perhaps by an emotional state of calf-love, Oz timidly talks to his Jerusalemite Arab Neighbor, the teen-age Aisha who writes poetry, across the fence of her marvelous stone house: “I expressed the view that there

²⁷ Ibid., 2.

²⁸ Ibid., 4.

²⁹ Ibid., 312.

was enough room in this country for both peoples, if only they had the sense to live together in peace and mutual respect ... [yet] I had to talk on tip-toe, as it were."³⁰

Viewing Jews and Arabs as equally victimized by Europe, albeit in different ways, Oz speculates on a humane solution to their conflict through some kind of solidarity between the persecuted and the oppressed. Such wishful thinking fills similar situations in which the Arabs and the Jews are entangled. Distressed by the dramatic population shift between East and West Jerusalem on the eve of the United Nations General Assembly passing the resolution to partition Palestine on November 29, 1947, and reliving conflicting sentiments in the wake of the Six-Day War of June 1967, Oz misses the Silwanis, his Arab neighbors, and wonders if they have found themselves some room in a refugee camp "where the sewage runs down the unpaved roads."³¹ He cynically adds: "And who are the fortunate Jews who now live in what was once an Arab family home in Talbiyeh, a neighborhood built of pale blue and pinkish stone with vaults and arches?"³²

Almost halfway through this book in which private and public events flow into each other without hint, Oz epitomizes the Arab-Jewish on-going tragedy rather simplistically, calling on the two adversary parties to recognize each other for what they are now, not for what their national memories have kept in stock. "The Europe that abused, humiliated, and oppressed the Arabs by means of imperialism, colonization, exploitation and repression is the same Europe that oppressed and persecuted the Jews."³³

To reduce an irreducible conflict in this manner is to shove off responsibility for the Palestinian tragedy and justify the ways for the Zionist project to right the wrong wrongly. Why should the intolerable mistakes of Europe that persecuted the European Jewry be visited upon the Palestinians in the form of mass punishment? Why should the Diaspora Jewry, victimized by Europe, remain victims forever? To pass the buck so irresponsibly would simply trifle the meaning of tolerance altogether.

Notwithstanding all that, the tale is replete with touching moments that uncover a range of issues: personal problems, family, neighborhood, leadership, violence, deprivations, rumors, and endless wars with the neighbors; yet it is all about words and their relationships to silence, "the silence you can only find at the bottom of a sea of ink."³⁴ It seems that

³⁰ Ibid., 313.

³¹ Ibid., 325.

³² Ibid., 329-330.

³³ Ibid., 22.

³⁴ Ibid., 527.

it is not enough for the Jew to re-invent the self as part of the national dream within a given historical context; the crux of the matter lies in the difficulty to sustain the Jewish national identity across a complex pluralistic society undergoing drastic changes. Oz breaks no news when he gradually uncovers the meaning of silence engulfing the solitary self that he is: "I have hardly spoken about my mother till now, till I came to write these pages... After my father died, I hardly spoke about him either. As if I were a foundling."³⁵

A Tale of Love and Darkness is a panoramic and meticulously complete narrative of the early life of its author, who has witnessed the "caesarean" birth of a nation on the soil of another one, and who seems to have undergone an appallingly stressful experience. Frustrated and disillusioned, Oz tries to rebel against parents, family, and the Zionist dream for all the unhappy moments he has passed through, but he only succeeds to do one thing: change his name.

David Grossman and Avraham Bulli Yehoshua do not seem to tell a different story than Oz. In fact, what makes the three of them keep rowing the same boat is one obsessive idea: the Holocaust memory as a political allegory, which in the words of the Jewish American historian Norman Finkelstein, has become an industry, a "death business".³⁶ However, keeping the bitter Jewish-European experience as a refrain in the sentimental retelling of their narratives, does not eclipse the shift those narratives share in recognizing the Palestinian other as an existing reality that cannot be totally ignored. In most of their narratives, the Palestinian regains physical and cultural existence and fills a space within the setting of the modern and contemporary Jewish tales that reproduce the self from a new vantage.

As a novelist, Grossman has been constantly criticized by many Israeli book reviewers for depicting Arab characters as humane, moderate, and "victims of victims". Confirming Shammass's view concerning identity (see *Arabesques*), Grossman writes, "[w]e [supposedly] share an identity ... we are all Israelis ... but this is the paradox of the survivor ... We survived to live and now we live to survive. Why? Because of our tragic history, they [the Palestinians] are paying the price of our inability to let go of our fears."³⁷ Questioning the Holocaust cult of victim-hood, Grossman admits that "the Holocaust still tragically deforms Israeli life, as Israeli children

³⁵ Norman Finkelstein, *The Holocaust as Industry: Reflections on the Exploitations of Jewish Suffering*, 2nd ed., London: Verso 2003, 20.

³⁶ *The Guardian* (Saturday, March 29, 2003), 22.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

go on educational visits to Auschwitz.”³⁸ However, Grossman’s opposition to the Palestinian refugees’ right of return undermines the atmosphere of tolerance he has been trying hard to cultivate in his readers.

Conclusion

For the past hundred years, both the Palestinian and the Jewish communities, in Diaspora as well as the Holy Land, have been making narratives that portray who they were and are in space and time. Although those narratives are distinct in scope, subject matter, and themes, it should be noted that they have recently undergone a gradual change in the area of re-presenting the self. The stories examined in this article show that there is a shift, no matter how tiny, taking place from the mythical to the realistic, and from total negation to partial recognition of the “Other” as an existing historical and cultural being. The Palestinians were trying hard to tell their own narratives and adjust the focus of others on their visibility as a people who have always been there. If the places from which they have been writing are distinct, and if critical reviews of their works have often polarized their voice, the shift from alienation to initiation as an issue permeating most of their narratives seems to have enabled them to write a strong sense of the self. It is the “We” standing out against the “I” that levels out their distinctions of origin.³⁹ It is the Palestinian authentic voice that is more audible now than phrases like “the Arab of the interior”, “the Arab Israeli”, “the Jew of the Jews”, or “the refugee” which until recently have been the most common labels defining the Palestinian. As tellers of their own narratives, the Palestinians have invariably voiced themselves on the platform of the Middle East in the battle of discourses and identity politics.

On the other hand, the Jewish Israeli story-tellers, although more privileged in terms of power relations than their Palestinian counterparts, have also made a shift in re-writing the self in terms of the “Other”. This shift reflects the dynamics of the complex situation in which they and the Palestinians find themselves fighting over space and time, together with all the representations endorsed therein. Those Israeli writers seem to have braved the Jewish Establishment by neutralizing the Jewish myth behind the creation of the State of Israel. Their realistic representation of the self

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ See the striking similarities in the memoirs written by Edward Said, *Out of Space: A Memoir*, London: Granta Books 1999; Hishām Sharābī, *Jamr wa-Ramād* (Embers and Ashes), Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalī‘ah 1978; and Salma Jayyusi, “Remembering Akka”, unpublished article 1997.

as restless, melancholic and disillusioned has been gradually taking shape over the last forty years during which the daily clashes with Palestinians must have conditioned this shift, albeit slight so far, in their narrative discourses. It is the readiness to tell one's story and to listen to the story of the "Other" that makes a difference. In the narratives examined, it seems that mutual recognition and awareness, irrespective of their mediocrity, have begun to dispel the shadowy meaning of tolerance in a cultural space where identity has been widely contested and wars have been fought in honor of absurdity.

Migrant Islam and Arab Racism in the Context of Globalisation*

MONA FAYAD

On Tolerance

When my friend learned I was working on a paper dealing with the issue of racism and tolerance she was rather vexed, and asked, “[d]o you believe in the notion of tolerance? Do you find it right?” She explained that every time an allusion is made to tolerance she feels there is a balance of forces tipped in favour of one side that is condescending to be tolerant!

My Christian friend has every right to be miffed as tolerance immediately suggests to her that she is accepted in the larger Muslim community as a “*dhimmī*”, the label signifying a non-Muslim. In other words, she is constantly reminded that she is being done a favour by her being accepted in this world, her world! Can’t she simply be accepted as an equal citizen, with the same rights and duties regardless of faith and creed? Can she be spared the “tolerance” that makes her feel an intruder for being a minority member in this wide Arab-Muslim world?

Guillemain captures the whole paradox inherent to the question. According to him, “tolerance” encapsulates a complex host of behaviours that simultaneously imply a negative attitude towards something, while blocking a behaviour leading to its suppression as something evil. It is a way of suspending the unfavourable results of assessing something negatively. This behaviour has become a virtue in modern society. It is, in Guillemain’s words, a strange virtue indeed which defends what is wrong or immoral! If it is good to protect, tolerate and collaborate with evil, isn’t there a contradiction, a sort of cowardice?¹

The question is: Why should we sympathise with beliefs and practices thought to be wrong or dogmatic? There is a need for this as the right to disagree was not historically recognized everywhere, especially in matters of religion.

* Translated from Arabic

¹ Bernard Guillemain, “Tolérance”, in *Encyclopédie Universalis*, Paris: Encyclopédie Universalis S.A., 2005, 1875.

The notion of tolerance itself is not that old. Its inception in the West dates back to the 16th century in Europe, with Montaigne.² Illiusius, Spinoza, Milton and Bail championed a specific notion of tolerance. However, in the 17th century John Locke was the first to publish something on the issue in his “Letter on Toleration”.³ It was then that the notion of tolerance acquired an established status. Locke’s letter was especially concerned with religious conflicts.

By the 19th century “tolerance” had already become an essential component of theorising how to bring about, and preserve, civil peace in a war-torn Europe.⁴

Under liberal ethics in the modern world a verdict has been passed condemning those who are intolerant, who are incapable of acting like someone patient, who would tolerate the presence of something they don’t like or agree with. A distinction has to be made here between tolerance and autonomy and freedom. Tolerance presupposes something we perceive as unsatisfactory or bad. An element of castigation is assumed in the meaning itself. We do not “tolerate” what we accept or what pleases us. But speaking about tolerance often refers to tolerating heretics, atheists, prostitutes or dissidents. All of which leads to something that is wrong. To be tolerant is to denounce first, then sublimate or condescend. Condescension presumes condemnation first.

Hence, it is paradoxically assumed that he who is tolerant has the power to act, but declines to do so. The approval of a certain action as a result of ignorance is no longer sufficient to be qualified as tolerance. The desire to explain tolerance as a moral ideal is a recent development, associated with the rationale of liberalism through two important things: the first links tolerance to an impartial state, and the second to autonomy or respect for people as individuals.

Migrant Islam and Arab Racism in the Context of Globalisation

According to Johnson and Mullen in their article on “Reduction of Prejudice”, it is not possible to speak about tolerance without referring to three inter-connected but distinct components: bias, stereotyping and racial discrimination.⁵

² And others, according to the same source.

³ John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration: Humbly Submitted*, James Tully, ed., U.S.A.: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983.

⁴ Susan Mendus, “Toleration”, in *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, London: Routledge 1992, vol. 3, 1717-1719.

⁵ Craig Johnson and Brian Mullen, “Reduction of Prejudice”, in *Survey of Social Science, Psychology Series*, in Frank Northern Magill and Jaclyn Rodriguez, eds., California: Salem Press, Pasadena, New Jersey 1984, vol. 4, 1848-1860.

Bias literally means “prejudice”, or the opinion we form about something or someone based on assumption rather than on current experience. Prejudice may be against, or in favour of something. However, in its common use prejudice signifies revulsion from a whole or part of a specific group, be it ethnic, religious, gender or an age group. The sociologist Albort defines prejudice as revulsion based on incorrect and rigid generalisation. Prejudice is a position rather than merely behaviour.

Stereotyping may simply be defined as “rigid generalisation” to use Albort’s terminology. To stereotype is to attribute certain characteristics to people, simply because they belong to a specific group. It is a rigid oversimplification of mental images that may have a grain of truth but would be loaded with incorrect generalisations built around it. What is interesting about stereotyping is that people continue to believe it even in the face of irrevocable evidence to the contrary; for example the word “‘abd” means “slave” in Arabic, but also “Black people”. The confusion of the two meanings today is a stereotype, as slavery does not exist anymore, at least legally (!). Nevertheless African people are still called “‘abd”, slaves, in most of the Arab countries. People often under-rate their own personal remarks, questioning them as presumed by their “grass-roots expectations”. That is why stereotypes can be extremely immutable.

In contrast to prejudice, racial discrimination has to do with behaviour: It is the denial of basic rights and/or opportunities to members of certain groups on the grounds of extensive variables like ethnicity, age, gender, faith or disability. Some studies have arrived at the conclusion that prejudicial positions do not necessarily result in a discriminative behaviour. Many people who show resentment against a particular ethnic group may treat its members in a fair and civilised fashion.

Both prejudice and stereotyping have in some cases generated sociological phenomena of rejection, like the exclusion of certain groups from the “mainstream” of society. In the United States, for instance, a combination of prejudice and economic negligence has resulted in the extinction of native Americans, or the exclusion of groups like Afro-Americans, women, Hispanics, etc.

Racism is one of the most controversial issues in the world. Racism is one aspect of intolerance. An Arab individual might think he is not racist because he is tolerant and lives in multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural countries. A Muslim Arab might believe he accepts, say, his fellow Christian or Kurd but his acceptance is of the kind suffered and resented by my Christian friend. The Copts for example make about 15% of the

Egypt's population. However, this reality is not reflected in the country's state structure, regime, power correlation and society.⁶

The Arab world has a minority problem: 200,000 Kurds in Syria have been without citizenship for 40 years.⁷ In Kuwait there is the problem of the "bidoons", Kuwaitis without citizenship, not to mention the Assyrians and Chaldeans in Iraq. Kamal Nawash⁸ points out that 78% of Arab Americans are Christians. What does that tell you? Is it a coincidence? Had they been fairly treated in their home countries for them to immigrate in such large numbers?⁹ There is an exodus of minority groups from the Middle East. Have we asked ourselves why? Are we going to act to stem this tide?

Those who are aware of the issue and discuss the existence of this racist, discriminative or prejudicial streak are Arab expatriates who have lived in the West and suffered from being different there. For example Ray Jureidini, who is actually the director of the Center for Migration and Refugee Studies at the American University of Cairo, became aware of the precarious status of foreign workers in the Arab countries after having lived in Australia. Having lived or studied abroad, many Middle Easterners come back with a new perception of the original world they had left for a while. They come back transformed in their view of racism and prejudice, more deeply aware of the problem.

However, it is observed that racism has changed its domain. It is no longer associated with a biologically-based attitude. Fear has shifted to the sphere of non-differentiation absorbed in a context of decline.¹⁰ Racism is acquiring a new face, unnoticed previously, a cultural face. In Lebanon for example, racist attitudes are often displayed against Palestinians, Syrians or Filipinos, not due to their "race" though, but rather for their being perceived as socially and culturally different by native Lebanese. There is a tendency to overlook the distinct cultural characteristics of the other, who therefore has to act and behave in accordance with cultural standards and criteria prevalent in his/her homeland or in his/her newly adopted country. In other words, he/she has to "disappear" in order to be invisible. This is

⁶ From Michael Munir, "Taḥāluf al-Muslimīn al-aḥrār li-mukāfāhat al-irḥāb" (The Alliance of Liberal Moslems against Terrorism), in Dr. Zuhdi Jaser *The Democratic Islamic Forum*. See <http://fletcher.tufts.edu/IslamIndemocraticsocietiesconf/bios.shtml>, last accessed in April 2007.

⁷ News: "The Demonstration of the Kurds", *al-Nahār* (06/10/2004).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ From "The Middle East American Convention" in Washington, 01/10/2004, *al-Nahār* (03/10/2004).

¹⁰ See Mona Fayyad, "al-Islām al-muhājir fī l-dawlah al-qawmiyyah namūdhaj Faransā", *Minbar al-Ḥiwār* 25 (1992), 45-61.

the new stated face of racism: A person who is discriminated against would eventually think: "I am different but no one wants to recognize my being different. I therefore feel crushed, lacking the existence I presume for myself or the existence I used to have in my previous life."

A common feature unites the Arab countries that import Asian or Arab labour. Apart from the way these workers are treated, especially in Lebanon, they have no chance of being granted the host country's citizenship. Our immigrants on the other hand are granted the citizenship of the country they have settled in, as in France for example.

In a public debate¹¹ someone objected to the Arabs being racists. He invoked history asking: "Did we not have a ruler like Ṣalāḥuddīn, a Kurd?" He forgot to add our most luminous thinkers like al-Farābī, Avicenna, al-Rāzī... who were Persians, not Arabs. What is not understood is that only now are we invoking Ṣalāḥuddīn's Kurdish origin, however, was his identity relevant at the time? Did he rule because he was a Kurd or on behalf of a Kurdish identity? Or did he rule in the name of Islam, and in the frame of an Arab culture and civilization? How many Arabs know nowadays that he was a Kurd? Did not the Arab individual generally behave according to the saying cited by the former tyrant Saddam Hussein: "Arabs, Kurds, what does it matter? After all, we are all Arabs!", including de-facto in this group all the others who do not necessarily belong to it. Do we recognize the minority rights of many ancient groups like the Assyrians, or the Mandaean, not to mention the Copts? The list is in fact much longer.

Among our modern examples is what Mr Haniyyah, head of Palestinian movement Hamas, said as he was trying to defend the Executive Force created by Hamas to replace the Palestinian security forces as created after the Oslo Agreement. Haniyyah denied that the newly built force was a gang - or militia. He declared that the Executive Force was not a "gang" like the *Peshmerga*, the Kurdish fighters. Muhannad Salahat wrote under the heading "Who shall apologise to the Kurdish People?", that:

[A]lthough the Kurdish *Peshmerga* does not represent the entire Kurdish people, the only people who have the right to judge this movement are the Kurds themselves.^[12] This prejudice cannot be accepted from someone who regards himself a representative of the Palestinian people, who are

¹¹ This debate occurred in what is called "Sociology Café", where professors and students, mostly from the American University of Beirut, meet to discuss a specific topic, and the topic of this discussion, on 29/11/2005, was Racism. It was led by Dr. Ray Jureidini.

¹² Note the prejudice also here.

suffering displacement and massacres, like the Kurdish people have. The Kurds are not ‘gangs’. They are an ancient people, who have their own history, and had existed on this soil for many hundreds years.¹³

This is true, and it would have been sufficient by way of reply. Yet, how about the mutual racist attitudes inadvertently or unscrupulously demonstrated on a daily basis? Just as those that were observed during the independence movement that swept through the country in the wake of the assassination of the former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Ḥariri. The position taken towards the Syrian regime rapidly developed into an almost generalised attitude towards the Syrian people. The assassinated journalist and Beirut commentator Samir Kassir had noticed this stance, condemned its implicit racist overtones and campaigned against it.

This is also true of the worsening prejudice against Iranians, based on the Iranian regime’s policies. The same racist attitude is adopted against Iranians by calling them Parsis, Magi and other derogatory names, borrowed from an ancient blood-soaked and racist history in order to vengefully revive old conflicts that hopefully will not turn out to be as perpetual. It is well known that Iran is made up of many ethnic groups, including Arabs, rather than strictly Persians. On the other hand, we would not want to go into what Iranians think of Arabs, with all the concomitant mutual prejudice between these diverse communities.

Public opinion in the Middle East is normally unaware of all this. Nor is it aware of the occasional upheavals associated with Arab migrants in France, or what has recently happened in Scandinavia over the caricatures of Prophet Mohammed and the problems they have caused.

All this can hardly be understood without considering that a sociological approach to Islam should be considered as a multifaceted social phenomenon involving psychological, political, economic and religious factors, as Gilles Kepel would say.¹⁴ Note has to be taken of a religious reality that is also historical, sociological, cultural, psychological and other things. In terms of individuals, there are various representations of Islam, perhaps as many as there are Muslims, as is the case with different representations of Christianity, Judaism and other faiths.

Hence, there are many ways to represent Islam: Islam-culture, Islam-refuge, Islam-protest, Islam-identity.

At one level, migrant Islam manifests itself as a system of commands and prohibitions that serve to willingly uphold difference or shoulder its responsibility. Otherwise, the difference that distinguishes this group – the

¹³ In his speech in *al-Nahār* (Saturday 6/10/2006).

¹⁴ See Mona Fayad, *ibid.*

Muslims – will be perceived as racial discrimination against Arab, Turkish and black immigrants, that is, they will be scorned and pointed out as such. In this context, Islam experiences a kind of transformation in terms of values and conventions. Shame is washed off and replaced by honour, with Islamic identity becoming a source of pride. The intense pressure of prohibitions and commands is the test to which followers choose to be subjected. It gives them a sense of submission to ethics and to a moral science higher than the positivist one, as it leads to the gates of heaven.

The emphasis on Islamic identity in the French and European context makes the obtention of citizenship something tolerable. Without stressing their religious identity, the migrant could appear to commit betrayal and apostasy

One way of thwarting the immigrant's feeling of being despised by Europeans, and his sense of hostility and inferiority, is to display difference, that is, to circumvent being indistinguishable. Thus when a young woman wears Islamic clothing and a young Muslim man grows a beard this is, above all, a kind of search for identity. For emphasis, the other is branded by assaulting this other's field of view. Insightful activities give meaning to cultural interaction, proceeding from symbols of the integrating society, or symbols of the reluctant. This meaning is produced by involvement in symbolic social codification or through negation. It will not be the first time that signs or similar marks have been derived in a society in crisis. Thus, displaying Fatima's hand – or a gold David star or a cross – is an expression of some sort of pride and symbolic haughtiness, an answer to the stigma in the sense used E. Goffman.¹⁵ Todorov¹⁶ writes that in this perspective clothing plays a major role. It allows me to position myself in relation to others. I choose my clothes taking others into consideration. I want to be like them, or at least like some of them, even when I tell them I am different. That is why there is truth in the saying that every human being is made of three parts: soul, body and clothes. Here, many veiled Arab Muslim women choose not to be like them in order to assert their difference.

A Possible Way of Integration

Could highlighting difference in a given society be a way of integrating distinctive groups in this society? Could it be a better solution than

¹⁵ E. Goffman, *Stigmaté*, Paris: ed. Minuit 1975.

¹⁶ Tzvetan Todorov, "De la Reconnaissance à l'estime de Soi", *Sciences Humaines* 131, Paris (October 2002), 22-24.

inducing it to withdrawal and isolation, even if it expresses lesser adaptation? Would it be possible to generalise this analysis and find out if it also applies to Muslim societies, and regard this intense return to symbols, signs and rituals as a kind of cultural self-defence by “distinguishing” it at the international-community level and by way of addressing this world as well? As some Muslim emigrants do so, this is their symbolic contribution to belonging to this world, which presents and generalises its own symbols. Is it not a kind of “Islamic modernism”, expressing a response to the feeling of exclusion and inferiority by also creating its own symbolic world?

But this, on the other hand, raises the race issue in the integrating society, the problem of the “other” and his relationship to “myself”, to “us” and “between us”. Generation of the latter is evidence of chauvinism and sectarianism, supported by this fear of the other who is at times projected as an internal threat to the social order.

Principally, racism assumes the existence of human races that differ from each other due to genetic qualities. But modern genetics studies show that this axiom bases itself on a scientifically discredited notion of race.

If the definition of race is scientifically incorrect, it becomes associated with the domain of misconception, delusion and prejudice. The question is why the struggle against prejudices seems so difficult.

According to R. Gerard in his book on violence and religion, it is generally believed that man is afraid of difference, and it is precisely what constitutes the essence of racism. Practice proves otherwise. What man is afraid of is uniformity.¹⁷ It is uniformity that causes social disintegration.

¹⁷ René Girard, *La Violence et le Sacré*, Paris: Grasset 1972, 117-118: “Difference is not the reason behind blind violence, its loss is. Social justice is rooted in the system of difference. The end of difference means that power overcomes weakness: that a father beats his son to death. This is the end of justice. There is no idea stranger than saying that justice is a balance at equilibrium, all the time, an abstraction that is never altered. Human justice is rooted in the system of difference.

That is why some societies dispose of twins. It might be thought that the issue is related to hierarchy, the hierarchy of the twins, which in itself is a problem, but not the basic one. Two persons come when only one is expected. The reason behind getting rid of one of the babies is not the problem of hierarchy itself, but its outcomes. There is no difference between the twins on the cultural level, and sometimes there is an astonishing similarity between them on the biological level. But where difference is lost, violence threatens. Confusion between the two presents itself on the culturally and biologically, thus, it is not surprising that twins arouse fear. They indicate and announce a great danger for any primitive society: indiscriminate violence. However, practicing violence against them would mean entering its cycle, so they are exposed or left to circumstances which make their death inevitable.”

Why?¹⁸ Because unity of the whole assumes its differentiation, that is, shaping it in a hierarchical form provided hierarchy is not confused with inequality.

Equality that denies difference is the cause of mutual fear. Man is afraid of “himself”, according to Gerard. But there is a risk that “the right to be different”, which is used by Le Pen as a tool of rejection, will provide cover for a new form of racism under the motto of respecting the particular identities of groups.

The protests and the furore provoked in France by the caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad might be an ultimate expression of objection; after them, Arab Muslims will perhaps integrate in European society, with the aid of improved mechanisms to assimilate them as for example in Sweden, England, Germany, or France, somehow the American way, that is, by their economic and social involvement.

The riots triggered by the caricatures took place in politically unstable suburbs where groups of Muslims, for various reasons, feel directly humiliated by the West or by West-propped repressive regimes in their home countries. The caricatures were simply the last straw. It is also true that some of these riots were politically oriented, like those which occurred in Damascus, or in Beirut. But many Muslims in Denmark reacted as most Danish citizens would: renouncing violence, engaging in dialogue and debate, writing in the press and appearing on TV shows. Like the population of Denmark as a whole they were dismayed to see scenes of the Danish flag being burned, the Danish embassy put to torch in Damascus and a similar act attempted in Beirut. The Danish flag is their flag and the embassy is that of the country they have chosen to live in by their free will.

Conclusion

There is recognition by compliance and there is recognition by differentiation. They are contrasting forms sought by us in different proportions. I want to be perceived either as different from the others or like the others, hence the importance of winning “la reconnaissance” from others, in the

¹⁸ You can refer here to Fouad Ishaq al-Khury, *Arab Mentality: Violence as Master Law*, Lebanon: Dar-al-Saki 1993, where he denotes that the absence of hierarchal structure of authority, domination becomes the core of political and social relations, and the dominant pole becomes the organizing structure in the realm of which all the subordinate individuals act. Within this duality of appearance in the form of the powerful on one hand, and approaching the world as if it were made of equal and independent units on the other, we are placed under the demand of being the first among equals.

sense used by Todorov in a study in its own right.¹⁹ He writes it is not by coincidence that of all primary processes Rousseau, Smith and Hegel valued gratitude, thankfulness or acknowledgment.²⁰

According to Todorov, recognition covers every endeavour. Seeking recognition may be a conscious or unconscious act setting in motion rational and irrational mechanisms. I can seek to capture the other's attention in different ways: by my being, shape, intelligence, voice or silence.

The compliant is apparently more modest than the claimant but the one needs recognition as much as the other. The satisfaction brought about by compliance with a group's standards largely explains the power of communal sentiments and the need to belong to a group, country or religious community. Following the habits of a local environment inspires a satisfied sense of belonging to a group. If I have nothing to be proud of in my personal life, I might be more likely to get militantly engaged in a larger number of associations to defend my reputation, family, country or faith. On the other hand, admiration by others is not the one most important thing in terms of recognition due to its close relationship to our values. Hatred and aggression by others are just as important. It is no less a proof of the importance of our existence. This largely explains conflicts of a racist nature currently raging in the world.

Nizār Agrī²¹ has reported the debate prompted in the Scandinavian countries following the Mohammed caricatures. One important issue that has emerged from this debate is that it is only natural for believers not to respect the convictions of non-believers. Non-believers are expected to do the same as regards the tenets of believers. What is needed is to respect the right to believe or to not believe. There is always the possibility for any of us to hold a belief that is not respected by others, or a belief that provokes and angers them. Believers cannot suppress their fury at those who deny the existence of their God. On the other hand, non-believers cannot conceal their frustration with people who believe in things that seem ridiculous to them.

¹⁹ Tzvetan, "Reconnaissance".

²⁰ Recognition is exceptional in two ways: first, because of the content itself, for it registers – more than any other act – the entrance of the individual in the substantial human existence. Yet it also has a structural quality, for it appears, in one way, as the indispensable companion of all other acts. When the child shares in cooperative or communicative activities, he is, at the same time, receiving reassurance for his own existence because his companion has left him space; and when he discovers the world around him or alters it, he gets an additional benefit, which is the proof of his existence. Every co-existence is recognition.

²¹ Nizār Agrī, "Ba'd al-rusūm al-kārīkātūriyah fī Iskandināfiyā" (After the Caricatures in Scandinavia), *al-Nahār* (16/04/2006).

In such a reality, the freedom of expression becomes a major issue. I believe that the freedom of expression is the freedom to choose a way of life, that is: to our liking. Needless to say, this freedom of expression, like religious freedom, can be utilized to express views that may not be acceptable to others or may even provoke their anger and indignation just as others may provoke our anger and indignation. The freedom of expression is not only to please and comfort but to challenge and incite. This is what conservative Muslim circles in Europe must realise and learn to accommodate – just as we have to learn it in our own countries in the Middle East.

Hence is the importance of tolerance, which implies accepting other ideas, and not to shun or exclude them even if they may annoy and provoke us. This tolerance is a precondition for peaceful coexistence in a world overcrowded with various views and beliefs. However, the term is often combined with notions of arrogance and conditional acceptance. Minorities that are tolerated by others often feel they are accepted out of pity without ever having a secure existence. We all know that massacres had been committed against Jews after centuries of formal tolerance in Western Europe. Bosnians who had for a long time lived in peace suddenly rose to butcher each other at the end of the 20th century.²² Nowadays, the Middle East is haunted by the spectre of Sunni-Shiite conflict that is experiencing resurgence in the Arab world. There is a need for more than tolerance. There is a need for respect of others and accepting their ideas and beliefs.

In our Arab world we need to recognize our discriminative actions so that we can be aware of and manage them. These actions are not irreversible. Europe had suffered bloodier conflicts but was able to overcome its problems when it embraced the rule of law as the sole authority to settle relations between people who are equal citizens; when it adopted the separation of state and religion; when it promoted the individual and improved his conditions at all levels, including the symbolic, social and economic levels, and when it gave him a balanced education in line with the objectives of citizenship. Reform of the political and education systems can go a long way towards this end.

²² The Bosnian war was an international armed conflict that took place in Bosnia - Herzegovina between March 1992 and November 1995.



Can Modernity coexist with the Millet System in Lebanon? A Sunni Muslim Perspective*

MAHMOUD HADDAD

Scholars have different views about the status of Ahl al-Dhimmah, and the way non-Muslims were treated under Islam, at different periods, under different rulers and dynasties, and in various geographical locations. Although we cannot make sweeping generalizations about the treatment of non-Muslims in these various historical and geographical contexts, there are Muslim writers who see in this type of organization of non-Muslim communities, based on religions and sects, a very reasonable way of dealing between the successive Islamic states and Muslim communities on one hand, and the non-Muslim communities, whether they represented the majority or the minority of the population, on the other.

Some of those Muslim writers¹ believe that Islam was most tolerant towards other religions that fell under the concept of “People of the Book” (Ahl al-Kitāb). Another group of Christian writers² perceive humiliation for non-Muslims under the same principle, compounded by the actual practices of some Muslim rulers and believe that non-Muslims were treated as second-class citizens.

However, both of these evaluations are not absolutely true, for the concept of *al-dhimmah*, during the Islamic periods, was essentially a principle

* Translated from Arabic

¹ For example Yūsuf Qaraḏāwī, *Ghayr al-muslimīn fī l-mujtamaʿ al-islāmī* (Non-Muslims in Muslim Society), 2nd ed., Beirut: Muʿassasat al-risālah 1983.

² Among others Rājī ʿAshqūnī, *Mihnat al-masīhiyyīn al-ʿArab* (The Ordeal of Arab Christians), Beirut: n.p. 1991, esp. chapter 2 entitled “al-Sharīʿah wa-l-muslim multazim” (The Sharīʿah is Clear and the Muslim is Committed), 41-48; *al-Masīhiyyūn fī Lubnān wa-l-Sharq: Ruʾā mustaqbaliyyah* (Christians in Lebanon and the East: Future Visions), edited by Būlus Naʿmān et. al., Ghusta: Dayr Sayyidat al-Naṣr 1997, esp. the introduction by father Naʿmān. For a more balanced view, Shafīq Yammūt, *Ahl al-dhimmah fī mukhtalif aṭwārihim wa ʿuṣūrihim*, (Ahl al-Dhimmah in their Different Epochs and Ages), Beirut: al-Sharikah al-ʿālamīyyah li-l-kitāb 1991, and father Suhayl Qāshā, *al-Masīhiyyūn fī l-dawlah al-islāmīyyah*, (Christians in the Islamic State), Beirut: Dār al-malāk 2002.

of tolerance, not of persecution; it meant “the protection of non-Muslims and their property, freedom of religion and worship, and it allowed non-Muslims to have certain privileges.”³ In return they had to pay the *jizyah* (poll tax) on adult males of sound mind as a kind of a political declaration of their loyalty to the Islamic state. However, they were “obliged to comport themselves in a self-effacing and inoffensive manner and were not permitted to publicize or proselytize their faiths.”⁴ Additionally, they were not required to pay the *zakāt* tax nor serve in the army.

But theory is rarely compatible with reality. Actually, there is some truth in both views; one must consider the historical circumstances experienced in different regions which made different approaches be applied regarding this subject, or regarding other subjects; but if we take a look at even the relationship between the Islamic state and the Muslim community itself, we find that this relationship was not a relationship of “butter and honey” in most periods and eras, even though non-Muslims had to pay extra tribute and taxes during certain phases.⁵

Yet *dhimmitude*, and later the Ottoman *millet* system, were definitely better than other systems of religious persecution and sectarianism that were prevalent in medieval and early modern Europe, which undertook a policy of eradication of the other. If the experience of Muslims and Jews in the Iberian Peninsula is generally well known, it is also interesting to refer to Sicily’s experience on the matter. The western historian Trainy, who was well known for his treatment of the history of the island, said that at the end of the twelfth century, Muslims were oppressed by the Christian princes of Sicily and were coerced by Christian feudalism, which made them flee to the rural areas, where they founded a rebellious movement. When Frederic II gained the rule in Sicily at the beginning of the thirteenth century, he crushed down the Muslims. For decades, they were expelled and reintegrated exclusively in the

³ See Sāsīn ‘Assāf, *Ma’ziq al-fikr al-siyāsī fī Lubnān: Mas’alat al-taghyīr* (The Predicament of Political Thought in Lebanon: The Question of Change), Beirut: Mukhtārāt 1991.

⁴ Ronald Netter, “Dhimmi”, in: *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Muslim World*, 2009, vol. 2, 71-72. See also, Claude Cahen, “Dhimma”, in: *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., vol. 2, Leiden: Brill 1983, 227-231.

⁵ Dina Abou Salem who studied the role of the Christian Coptic community in Fatimid Fustāt argues using a social and non-theological approach “that their status and role, although set clear by Islamic Sharī‘ah, and particularly, Isma‘īlī law, depended as well on the pragmatism of the respective caliphs. Cases of taxation, confiscation of property, and appointments in governmental positions reflected a reality which is distant from what the law stipulated”. See her *Subject to the Caliph, distant from the Law: the Status and Role of the Coptic Community in Fatimid Fustāt*, M.A. Thesis, Department of History and Archaeology, American University of Beirut 2004, vii.

Apulia region. Sicilian Arabism was dead, politically and culturally, after it had flourished in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and it remained like this until it vanished around 1300.⁶

No doubt the two systems, *dhimmitude* and/or the *millet* that were brought by Islam and/ or Muslim political authorities, were much more tolerant than the political and social systems which competed with them, before the modern age. We can say that the *dhimmī* system (though not providing modern equality) was the worst possible system in the medieval period with the exception of all other systems, similar to the way Winston Churchill described democracy in the twentieth century. The alternative was to cut off the necks of those who were different in religion, or displace them, or force them to change their faith as a condition to allow them to live, as did the Spaniards with the Muslim and Jewish inhabitants of Andalusia in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.⁷

Nevertheless, as Roland Netter holds, “in the modern period, the *dhimmī* status has in practice become quite meaningless in most Muslim countries. This is a result of the creation of nation-states throughout the Islamic world and the consequent adoption of Western and quasi-Western legal and political systems.”⁸ The problem we are confronted with in the modern period begins with the attempted assimilation of the Ottoman Empire, through the various Tanzimat (reforms) in the nineteenth century to the process of secularization in Europe, which seemed to have overcome the times of religious and sectarian wars and chose the modern and equitable concept of “citizenship” of individuals of the same country instead. The Ottoman Empire issued a number of modernized legislations the most important of which was the Hatt-i Sharīf of Gülhane declared by Sultan Maḥmūd II in 1839 in which all Ottoman citizens were considered equal under the Sharī‘ah. However, western powers pressured Istanbul to follow a practically westernized and dual policy that resulted in Sultan ‘Abdulmajīd I issuing on February 18, 1856 a decree of privileges called reforms,⁹ named “İşlāḥāt

⁶ R. Trainy, “Şikilliya”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., vol. 9, Leiden: Brill 1996, 582-589, here 586.

⁷ Muḥammad ‘Abdallāh ‘Annān, *Dawlat al-Islām fī l-Andalus* (The Islamic State in Andalusia), 4 vols, (Cairo: Maṭba‘at Miṣr, 1952-1958), vol. 4, *Nihāyat al-Andalus* (The End of al-Andalus) (1958).

⁸ Ronald Netter, “Dhimmī”. Father Būlus Na‘mān refuses the notion of the existence of nation-states in the Middle East, see Na‘mān, *al-Masīhiyyūn*, 25.

⁹ *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics: A Documentary Record*, compiled, translated, and edited by J.C. Hurewitz, New Haven, London: Yale University Press 1979, vol. 1, 269-70, 315-18. On the divergence between the earlier Ottoman modernizing steps of 1839 and the westernizing steps of 1856 see, Butrus Abu Manneh, *Studies on Islam and the Ottoman Empire in the 19th Century (1826-1876)*, Istanbul: Isis Press 2001.

Fermānī”, with the purpose “to confirm the privileges and immunities of non-Islamic groups”, and it ordered the implementation of the following actions: “We grant (according to the Hatt-i Sharīf Hümayun of Gülhane) perfect security to all the populations of our Empire for their lives, their honor, and their properties [...]”¹⁰ It reaffirmed the privileges of non-Muslims: “All the privileges and spiritual immunities granted by my ancestors’ *ab antiquo*, and at subsequent dates, to all Christian communities or other non-Mussulman [sic] persuasions established in my empire, under my protection, shall be confirmed and maintained.”¹¹

Thus, a hybrid and contradictory Ottoman legal system emerged, unprecedented in the West itself. It was a combination of bestowing both “equality” and “privileges” on the minorities, particularly if we add to the privileges of non-Muslim communities another issue, relating to the privileges of extra-territoriality that were bestowed on the Western foreigners and known as “the capitulations” (*imtiyāzāt*)¹² and which benefited also, directly and indirectly, mainly local as well as foreign non-Muslims.

While Islamic regimes and/or rulers did not usually bestow any exclusive social rights on Muslims in the periods before the modern European intervention (many non-Muslims were employed by the Islamic states in the civilian bureaucracy), it revealed a new political and a social impact with the new and dual interaction with Europe. Thus, the citizenship system of equality coexisted with the *millet* system giving to each non-Muslim religious group the right to manage its own affairs, like taking care of its own endowments (*waqfs*) or litigating intra-minority social matters. This was reflected in the political system, where it was considered that the quasi-European constitutional system adopted since 1876 requires the representation of Muslims and non-Muslims according to the principle of citizenship for each Ottoman, but also on the basis of sectarian affiliation. In this sense, it was non-Muslims who practically became first class citizens whilst Muslims were degraded to second class citizens.

It is remarkable that this situation was confirmed by the French Mandate in Lebanon and Syria after World War I. The main Christian communities won more political, military and economic privileges and most sovereign powers that were considered compatible with the newly established political-sectarian system since they held most, if not all, the

¹⁰ Abu Manneh, *Studies*, 315-316, here 316.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Halil Inalcik, “Imtiyāzāt. ii. The Ottoman Empire”, in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., vol. 3, Leiden: Brill, 1208-1219.

highest effective posts in the new state. This was attained, for example, through emphasizing the supreme powers of the Maronite Christian president of the new republic at the expense of the Sunni prime minister and the Shiite speaker of the parliament.

According to article 9 of the French inspired 1926 Lebanese constitution, ministerial portfolios and public sector jobs would be filled on an “equitable” confessional basis. This article that is still operative in the Lebanese post-independence system entrenched sectarianism in Lebanon’s public life up to this very day.¹³ The Muslim sects, especially the Sunni community, who were declared to constitute the second largest sect at the time, were not satisfied for several reasons. Among else, it now wished the special autonomous status that used to be given to the non-Muslim *millet*s under the Ottomans to protect itself from the dominance of the foreign and local non-Muslims who were in control of the region after WWI. Some in the Sunni community believed before the eruption of the 1975 civil war that they had become subjects rather than citizens (a form of Ahl al-Dhimmah in reverse).¹⁴ That is why they demanded to become a *millet* like the Christian *millet*s although they had used to consider themselves as the representatives of the *ummah* (Muslim community of believers) until the end of the Ottoman period, and had no separate and autonomous special framework for its community similar to the “*millet*” system applied to non-Muslims.

In this context, Sheikh Rashīd Riḍā (born in Qalamūn few kilometers south of Tripoli-Lebanon) wrote in his Cairo based monthly *al-Manār* in 1928 an article entitled “The *Millet* Councils: Why don’t we enjoy in our Country after the transfer of Power to Others what Others enjoyed when they were under our Domination?”. He said:

Islamic governments allowed non-Muslims to manage their own affairs and their denominational interests, and they had freedom to act; the management of their churches, their dwellings, and their monasteries with their extensive *waqf* [religious or family endowments, MH] was in their hands; their religious leaders led the prayer-service and judged in what pertained to marriage, marital expense, custody, inheritance and other matters in which governments did not interfere; but if non-Muslims had recourse to these governments, they were judged like Muslims. This matter is related to when the Jews had recourse to Muḥammad the Messenger to judge between them; we read the following passage in the Qur’ān: ‘If they come to you, then you may judge between them or turn away from them; and if

¹³ George Corm, *Le Liban Contemporain*, Paris: La Découverte 2005, 91-92.

¹⁴ See, for example, Muḥammad ‘Alī Ḍinnāwī, *al-Muslimūn fī Lubnān: Muwāṭinūn lā ra’āyā* (Muslims in Lebanon: Citizens not Subjects), Beirut: n.p. 1973.

you turn away from them then they cannot harm you in the least; and if you judge then judge between them with justice. God loves those who are just (5:42).⁷ And when governance moved in some Muslim countries [e.g. Lebanon and Syria, MH] to foreign Europeans [Ifrañj] hands, Muslims were not treated in these lands in the same way they themselves treated Jews and Christians and others in these countr[ies], although they were sometimes controlling them heavily [...]

Some of those governments even took over the Muslim *waqf* in some countries and left them no free hand regarding these non-political matters [...]

We are aware of what the French protectorate is doing in Morocco, the disposition of the Muslim endowments [*waqf*] and the control of their religious matters. We fear [a repeat of] the evil consequence of [what the French have done in] Muslim Algeria...¹⁵

In a sharp and telling twist Rashīd Riḍā then called for the establishment of an Islamic *millet* council in Beirut following the example of non-Muslim *millet* councils which had existed under Ottoman rule, and he described the discussions among leading Muslims concerning this matter as follows:

After the European occupation of Syria in the aftermath of WWI, the Muslims of Beirut thought of establishing a *millet* council [of their own]; their dignitaries commissioned the late Aḥmad Mukhtār Bey Bayhūm and others to persuade me to assume the administration of their religious matters either personally or by coordination with the *millet* council after I have suggested this project and gave them as an example the *millet* council of the Copts in Egypt, but I declined to accept. This took place during my stay in Syria in late 1918. Aḥmad Mukhtār [Bayhūm], with some friends, pledged that Muslims will pay the *zakāt* on their wealth and that I can spend the money [among the poor] on their behalf as I like.

Sheikh Riḍā's objective and the objective of those who shared his opinion about the Supreme Muslim Sharī'ah Council in Beirut, and then in all of Lebanon, paved the way to establish other similar councils for the Shiite and the Druze communities. This further emboldened the Lebanese sectarian system. Sheikh Riḍā expressed his opinion about the formation of the Supreme Islamic Council in Beirut when he made the point that

[t]he dream of a *millet* council had long been crossing the minds of the Muslims of Beirut; God made it happen this year; they had just established a system for it and they have elected its members from among the finest young men known for their envy and activity; we were very pleased – if

¹⁵ *al-Manār*, vol. 29, no. 9 (10/02/1928), 715-717. Since France considered Algeria not a colony, but a department or a province of the French nation-state, it pursued a vigorous anti-Islamic and anti-Arabic policy there.

only there were some eminences in the Senate – and we hoped that the Muslims in Tripoli and other cities would do the same. If only they could establish *millet* boards such as this council in Syria and Lebanon, and their surroundings, and then found a *millet* council for them all, called the Supreme Islamic Council for the *millet* interests, for the localized boards to turn to in public affairs and religious education, in the public administration of the Islamic courts and what is related to the *waqf* revenues, while taking into consideration the religious laws pertaining to the creators of the endowments, which should be compatible with the Sharī'ah...¹⁶

Thus, the collapse of the “Islamic” Ottoman Empire and its replacement by the rule of the extremely secular France did not lead to any changes in the *millet* system and its substitution for the concepts and practices of the occidental modern “citizenship”. On the contrary, Paris consecrated what Istanbul had done centuries before and added to it in different directions, giving priority and more privileges to non-Muslim minorities.

Nowadays, Lebanon is witnessing a real sectarian and *millet* dilemma. While some of its intellectuals are calling for achieving secularism after more than two decades of internally and externally inspired civil wars, the structure of the current system did not change, even though some political groups and parties have changed their position.

The sectarian organization of the state agreed upon in the National Pact of 1943 was kept in the Tā'if Accord of 1989 which included amendments that put the Lebanese in a dilemma. Now, the political sectarian cake was to be divided equally between Christians and Muslims instead of privileging the Christians as the situation used to be until 1989.

The dilemma is that the Lebanese religious groups are confused, for they do not, in fact, want to renounce the privileges granted by the *millet* system. However, they seek to liberate themselves from the burden of the others' partnership in the political and economic system. Herein resides the crisis of citizenship that multicultural Christian-Muslim societies failed to resolve. The complaint of marginalization is the ideology of every Lebanese religious or sectarian community: first, the Sunnites, then the Shiites, then the Greek Orthodox, and finally, after some misfortunes, the Maronites. To add to the difficulties, in most cases after the 1990s those who complain about their marginalization are not marginalized by other local parties in Lebanon, but by a regional or international party which exercises a direct or indirect influence on the Lebanese local scene.

For instance, there was an article published in the Lebanese press in 2007 which was entitled “Before the Presidential Elections: Get rid of the

¹⁶ *al-Manār*, *ibid*.

Sunnites' rule in Lebanon."¹⁷ The author believed that the core of the Ṭāʿif agreement was that the Maronite executive power was transferred from the Maronite presidency to the Sunnite premiership. She expressed the opinion that the Christian community should ally itself with the Muslim Shiite party of Hezbollah in order to balance the rising power of the Sunnis. The writer glossed over the fact that the Sunni P.M. was perceived by his own community as a mere rubber stamp for the Maronite president before 1989 accord. She asked: "Is it not time to find a resolution that preserves the rights of everyone on the basis of citizenship?"¹⁸ Another article by the same author related the situation of the Christians during the last Lebanese civil war as follows: "We were treated like Ahl al-Dimmah, others chose for us our representatives in the parliament and government."¹⁹ We also usually read and hear especially from individuals or speakers in the name of some Christian Lebanese groups: "We refuse to be treated like *dhimmīs*" and/or "There is no return to *dhimmitude*."

Muslims, especially Sunni Muslims, are perplexed by such stances of strident tone and with its content. The present Lebanese social and political system was founded about a century ago since the beginning of the French Mandate in 1920 based on a clear Christian dominance, consolidated by different laws and official practices. Although the Ṭāʿif agreement of 1989 gave equal rights to Christians and Muslims in the country and the Sunni prime minister became nominally as powerful as the Maronite president, the holders of actual political and military power on the ground are not the Sunnis but the Shiite armed parties and organizations like Hezbollah and its regional sponsors (Syria and Iran). Additionally, the change in the distribution of political power cannot be immediately translated into the distribution of economic and social powers, especially in regard to economic and commercial relations that are tilted considerably in the interest of non-Muslim groups. Although accurate statistics are not available, it is important to report the findings of one Lebanese historian, who made the point that the Lebanese high bourgeoisie is composed of 30 families, 24 of which (80 percent) are Christian, and 6 of which (20 percent) are Muslim.²⁰

The refusal of *dhimmitude* by the Christians is not, of course, senseless. If they had previously considered themselves a majority in Lebanon, and

¹⁷ *al-Nahār* (17/04/2007), 9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Laylā al-Raḥbānī, "Laysa ladaya khawf min Ḥizballāh" (I do not fear Hezbollah), *al-Nahār* (02/02/2006), 9.

²⁰ Fawwāz Tarābulṣī, "al-Takwīn al-ṭabaqī li-l-sulṭah al-siyāsiyyah baʿda al-ḥarb" (Class Formation of the Political Power after the War), *Abʿād* (Beirut) no.6 (May 1997), 79-92, here 81.

were entitled matters forbidden to others, they knew then that they were a minority in the regional neighborhood, a neighborhood that used to call for one sort or another of regional unity (whether secular or religious) that could move them from a majority to a minority status. Furthermore, the Christian communities had lost their majority even inside Lebanon according to unofficial statistics, which in turn explains their refusal to carry out a national census since 1932. Yet Christian fear or xenophobia of the Muslim (read Sunni majority) in the regional geographical neighborhood overlooks an essential fact, which is that no Sunni Muslim's majority political authority is actually in control of either adjacent Palestine on the one hand or Syria on the other, not today and since many decades.

Many Muslims in Lebanon and some other Arab countries relate, in our opinion, to the description of the Lebanese writer Ilyās al-Khūrī, who responded to those afraid of the Muslim majority's hegemony over the minority:

Who is in danger? The majority or the minorities? [...] We accept as an a priori judgment, an assumption imposed by propaganda that the danger is on the minority. The real question begins with the remark that with the beginnings of imperial pressure on the Arab region, the majority and the nation were under attack. The goals were the disintegration of the nation into mini-states, insulting Islam with racist writings, and with obligatory educational programs.

Nowadays, we witness how the majority considers itself as oppressed and how, at least in our country, it feels as if it is threatened in its very existence. Here, the matter of minorities becomes a form of societal destruction, and the inability of the national movement to find a democratic solution to the minorities' cause is attributed to its failure to be a united pole against the external invasion. It is a pity to consider that the sectarian trends reached their peak after June's [1967] defeat, and that sectarianism took a major political shape in our country after the victory of "modernity" on the local level...²¹

Between those two conflicting opinions, it seems to me that modernity, which infiltrated Arab societies, and Lebanon in particular, remained based on weak political grounds which could be described as "pre-modern", or even "anti-modern". The determination to give the *millet* or the religious sect a weight – however is its magnitude – in the political arena will result in an inevitable failure of tolerance and/or equality the recurrence of the explicit or implicit oppression among groups and individuals of these communities, along with the continuous external interferences in our domestic affairs. Modern secularism is a relation between the state and each individual in society, whereas the *millet* relationship presupposes a relation

²¹ *al-Masāḥīyyūn al-ʿArab: Dirāsāt wa-munāqashāt* (The Arab Christians: Studies and Discussions), Ilyās al-Khūrī, ed., Beirut: Muʿassasat al-abḥāth al-ʿarabiyyah 1981, 125.

between the sectarian groups on one hand and the state on the other. The dealing with any group as a group assumes a negation of multiculturalism within the group itself and denies individualism and the role of the individual; it lays the foundation for discrimination between these groups, in the long or short run. Thus, traditional sectarianism did not shrink, but rather expanded with time contrary to what many Arab progressive and secular ideological trends had anticipated around the mid twentieth century.²²

The real dilemma was expressed by Pascal Monin, the director of the Faculty of Information and Communication at Saint Joseph University, when he stated:

[a]part from our preliminary positive attitude towards the civil state, we state that this matter is subject to many precautions in the Lebanese case, in particular within the bad sectarian situation which prevails in these days. That is why some see that the trend to secularism, in Lebanon, is a trend to separate these political and societal blocks from the state.²³

Thus, the danger is in the extremist opinions that see that “federalism is the solution” (matches with “Islam is the solution”); a whole book was written on the subject by Dr. Jean Sherro, entitled “*al-Fidirāliyyah hiya al-ḥall*”.²⁴

In the opinion of this observer of contemporary Lebanese history, the duality of equality and privilege in the Lebanese system would either perpetuate the present conflict among unequal sectarian groups (whether by demographic size of these different groups or through the gap of their economic wealth) or lead eventually to a sect-based geographical federal system to flee the consequences of the demographic imbalance. Of course, a less pessimistic possibility exists if the Lebanese can agree and feel comfortable with establishing a political system (no matter confessional or secular) that they really respect and play by its rules. It is imperative that such a system cannot be secure unless the other regional powers agree to respect it as well. Let us not forget that the Swiss system would have never worked had all the neighboring European powers to Switzerland not accepted its rules even during continental and two world wars.

²² Buṭrus Labakī, “*al-Madkhal al-ṭawāʿifi ilā mujtamaʿ madanī ghayr mutawattir*,” (The Sectarian Introduction to a Tension-free Civil Society), *al-Nahār* (25/07/2010), 9.

²³ Pascal Monin, “*al-Kanīсах wa-l-siyāsah fī Lubnān*” (The Church and Politics in Lebanon), *al-Nahār* (05/08/2007), 9.

²⁴ Jean Sherro, *al-Fidirāliyyah hiya al-ḥall* (Federalism is the Solution), Beirut: no publisher 2007.

Enduring Dialogue: A Contextual Approach to Interfaith Dialogue in the Middle East

MAHMOUD NATOUT

One of the principal themes in this conference, and also evident in its title, is ‘tolerance’. When this notion is situated in a context such as Lebanon, religion is often summoned to our consciousness and the notion of tolerance becomes infested with undertones of religious conflict and sectarian segregation. In addition, what may be communicated by the notion of ‘tolerance’ is the implication that inherent in such a concept is a remedy for what most popular discourses portray as an ancient conflict that has been characteristic of the encounter between the different religions that inhabit the Middle East. Furthermore, the alleged ‘primeval’ and ‘enduring’ conflict, as depicted by ‘history’, has become the cornerstone of most scholarly discourses that endeavor to examine and propose ways to reconcile or resolve conflict. Such attempts built, in many cases, the underlying framework for different dialogical models that have become popular in western as well as Middle Eastern cultures. However, after a long-standing experience of ‘interreligious dialogue’ in Lebanon, many have lost interest and hope in such an enterprise. Prominent clergymen such as Metropolitan Gregory Haddad and Metropolitan George Khodr have adamantly stated that conventional Christian-Muslim dialogue endeavors in a country like Lebanon are “a waste of time”.¹ However, the terms ‘interreligious’ or ‘interfaith’ or even ‘religion’ have become so prevalent in discourses concerning ‘dialogue’ or ‘tolerance’ that we sometimes fail to reexamine the history of such terms and the implications for our understanding of such notions. As a consequence, some of the questions which this essay will address are: what is our understanding of the term ‘Religion’? How did this concept emerge? And what is our ‘understanding’ of ‘conflict’ that is portrayed as inherent and ubiquitous in such a notion especially in a region like the Middle East? Before attempting to conjure more methods and models to promote tolerance and reconciliation among the different religions in this area, it is nec-

¹ From an interview with Metropolitan Gregory Haddad on April 15, 2006.

essary to reexamine the definitions of ‘religions’ that we have adopted in addition to reexamining the popular models that describe the history of the interaction between the different faiths that exist in this part of the world. After rethinking such terms, perhaps we can emerge with a contextual perspective of religious diversity in Lebanon and the Middle East.

Furthermore, many of the definitions regarding the ‘history’ and the ‘religions’ of the Middle East have been coined by western enlightenment discourses which we have adopted and, if I may say, deified. Therefore, one question which this essay aims to address is whether it is possible to ‘de-deify’ ‘religion’ and the ‘history’ with which it is concerned and recognize the cultural and historical underpinnings and constraints with which such notions have been expressed. In addition, I will explore whether the abovementioned popular definitions are imperative for speaking about ‘dialogue’ and ‘tolerance’ in the Middle East. If not, are there other aspects or dimensions through which ‘dialogue’ and ‘tolerance’ can be explored?

Talal Asad, in his book *Genealogies of Religion*, explores “how religion as a historical category emerged in the West and has come to be applied as a “universal concept” emphasizing that such a concept was a construction of European modernity and was a tool that legitimized particular forms of ‘history making’.”² Asad argues that the definition of religion in general as a ‘transhistorical’ and ‘transcultural’ phenomenon is but an expedient devised by either secular liberals to confine ‘Religion’ beyond the secular arena of power struggle, or by liberal Christians to defend religion.³ Many post-colonial thinkers like Asad have explored claims maintained by the ‘West’ about the ‘East’ especially in a time when much political turmoil is prevalent in the latter and in particular the Middle East. Richard King, in *Orientalism and Religion*, analyzes the concept of ‘religion’ in light of the Christian theological perception and its enlightenment underpinnings of this notion. King focuses on colonial elements within western discourse about Indian culture and religion and how it contributed to the construction of the object that it claimed to explain.⁴ King also notes that the modern category of ‘religion’ is a western construction that is a product of enlightenment presuppositions. He concludes in saying that ‘religion’ is a Christian theological category and it is “questionable to assume that there

² Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Disciplines and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, London: Johns Hopkins University Press 1993.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India, and ‘The Mystic East’*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999.

are such things as “religions” outside a Christian-influenced context.”⁵ King then argues that academic disciplines such as religious studies and Indology should “work to extricate themselves from Christian categories and secular assumptions, which continue to influence representations of the Orient, particularly the emphasis that is placed upon the so-called ‘world religions’.”⁶

In the nineteenth century, Darwinian evolution contributed to a major shift in European thought. In light of Victorian evolutionary ideas, religion was seen as an early human condition from which law, science, and politics evolved and became detached.⁷ Many contemporary anthropologists, according to Talal Asad, have rejected this Victorian idea. They argued that religion is not an archaic form of science, law, or politics, but rather an irreducible form of human belief, having an inherent essence of its own. This essentialist definition of religion leads to the belief that such a phenomenon can exist ‘transhistorically’ and ‘transculturally’, and has an essence of its own regardless of space and time, standing completely separate from law, politics, and science.⁸ Most post-colonial theorists, like Asad and King, argue against a universal definition of religion. They claim that such attempts at defining the latter are the historical product of discursive processes and political agendas. Asad, in particular, maintains that for non-Westerners to understand their local history, they must inquire into Europe’s past because it is through the latter that the world’s history has been assembled. In other words, the definition of religion in the East has been evolving in Europe and the ‘West’ in general since the eighteenth century.

Such definitions and conceptions of religion have been integrated into Middle Eastern discourse in an attempt to explain and try to resolve what western discourse portrays as an ancient ideological conflict among religions in the Middle East. What is of concern is the notion that such definitions of religion that have essentialized and categorized religions in the Middle East have been adopted by the subjects of such definitions and have been internalized and integrated into their faiths. Mohammad Arkoun, in *Rethinking Islam*, observes that “Muslim apologists together with Islamic militants have transformed what is, in essence, an ideological specificity constructed by the western scientific study of Islam into historical and doctrinal ‘authenticity’ that only Islam, in their view, managed to bequeath and preserve through the centuries and across diverse sociocultural settings

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Asad, *Genealogies*.

⁸ Ibid.

where it spread.”⁹ We can go further by extending this reductionist discourse, which local thinkers have adopted as their own, to the understanding of ‘religious conflict’ as it is portrayed by popular discourse concerning the Middle East in general and Lebanon in particular. The advocated premise is that sectarian struggle in Lebanon is but a manifestation of a long-lasting and prevalent religious struggle that is characteristic of the Middle East. This notion, I wish to argue, is also reductionist. Let us consider a tragic event in Lebanese history, namely the massacres of 1860 in Mount Lebanon, in an attempt to flesh out the popular misconceptions associated with such a tragedy. Usāmah al-Maqdisī, in his article ‘Understanding Sectarianism’, explains that religious violence and the sectarian political discourse in Lebanon are undoubtedly the product of the modern world and not the inevitable product of history.¹⁰ He then adds that religious violence, such as the bombing of a Mosque in India, is often interpreted as an inevitable culmination of a long history of animosity between the Hindus and the Muslims in South Asia. Al-Maqdisī then argues that common discourse that accompanies this sectarian violence and vindicates it undermines what he refers to as historical nuances.¹¹ Such discourse is commonly filled with general statements about the long-standing and unwavering animosity between different faiths, and that adherents to such faiths are in utter opposition to any identity that transcends a particular sect. This, according to al-Maqdisī, ignores historical factors and adheres to a simplistic understanding of what in reality is a complex and nuanced nature of a modern and constructed world.¹²

Let us for a moment consider the massacres of 1860. This catastrophic event is often regarded as evidence that corroborates the argument concerning the ubiquity of sectarian conflict in this part of the world, emphasizing this conflict as inherent to Middle Eastern culture and history. Regarding the massacres of 1860, it is important to note that social status and not sectarian affiliation determined the political atmosphere in Mount Lebanon during this era.¹³ In such rural social systems, the segregation was between those considered as elites and those considered ‘ignorant’ regardless of religious affiliations.¹⁴ However, European forces which were adamant about

⁹ Mohammad Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, trans. and ed. Robert D. Lee, Oxford: Westview Press 1994.

¹⁰ Usāmah al-Maqdisī, “Fahm al-ṭāʾifiyyah”, in: *al-Adab* 54 (2006), 55-58.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

‘saving’ Eastern Christians from ‘subjugation’ emphasized the importance of ‘reform’ and the use of religious channels to realize this reform.¹⁵ In the middle of the nineteenth century, European forces intervened in this area through clear religious channels whereby the French supported the Maronites and the English the Druze. In addition, in 1824, the European forces were resolute about dividing Mount Lebanon into sectarian areas in spite of Ottoman reluctance to do so.¹⁶ And much of what fueled such a clash were the conflicting notions of reform advocated by the Europeans and the Ottomans. Such reforms came in response to, among other things, the increasing presence and influence of European powers, namely the English and French, in the Near East in the nineteenth century through missionary, religious, and educational institutions, as well as the continuous pressures that these powers exerted on Ottoman authorities to ‘accommodate’ the needs of the ‘minorities’ they governed. Al-Maqdisī, among others, argues that such categories as ‘religion’ and ‘sect’, which refer to the groups of people that had existed for centuries under Ottoman rule in the form of *millets*¹⁷, were the product of an Orientalist reading of the Near East. These categories were further reinforced by the increasing foreign patronages and political support from such powers as England and France, among others, which stood in dissonance with the concomitant Ottoman reforms that were attempting to remedy and maintain a situation that was otherwise slowly but inevitably becoming unmanageable.¹⁸ As a consequence, it can be argued that the resultant sectarian narrative that arose during the 1860s was not a rekindling of an old religious conflict, as some Orientalist viewpoints attempt to argue, but rather a modern discourse that sprung from contemporary influences.¹⁹ From the above discussion, it may become evident that categorizing sectarian conflicts in Lebanon as a manifestation of a persistent clash between different religions is inaccurate and dubious.

The aforementioned concerns have led me to explore the matter at hand by adopting a different approach that has not received proper attention especially in this region of the world. I have attempted to tackle the history of this region vis-à-vis its interfaith dimensions from a socio-historical

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ The term ‘*millet*’ was used by Ottoman authorities to refer to the various confessional communities in the Empire and the corresponding separate legal systems and ‘personal laws’ under which such communities were allowed to govern themselves, such as the Shari‘ah for Muslims, the Christian Canon for Christians, and the Halakha for Jews.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 56-7.

perspective which allows the portrayal of history as a continuum of exchange rather than as fragmented and essentialized. To elucidate this approach, I will refer to a few anecdotes in different communities in Lebanon and Syria where ‘dialogue’, not in the traditional sense of the word, between Christianity, Islam, and other traditions perpetually takes place within the communities’ customs and traditions. This ‘dialogue’ is, I believe, the inevitable product of an ongoing interaction and exchange of beliefs, cultures, and traditions among the different faiths that inhabit this region. A few examples might prove illuminating.

In a small town in North Lebanon called Lāsa near Byblos, where the population is predominantly Shiite, women, after kneading the dough, inscribe the shape of a cross on the finished dough to bless it. It is customary for a shepherd in that town to wave his stick in the shape of a cross to cast evil spirits out of a forest before entering it.²⁰ In two small villages in Syria called Bakh‘a and Jubb‘ādīn that belong to the Syrian Qalamūn, where the population is primarily Sunni, many of the popular folklore songs and chants are, to this day, Christian chants in Syriac.²¹ I have observed that the prayers at the Umayyad Mosque in Syria are close to Eastern Christian chants in spirit and composition. The most integral verse in Islam “*Bismillāh al-rahmān al-rahīm*” was and is still used today by many Eastern Christians to signify the holy Trinity.²² Moreover, many of God’s attributes in Islam such as *al-quddūs*, *al-rahmān*, etc. predate Islam as they were and are still used in Christian prayers in Lebanon, Syria and other Arabic speaking countries.²³ Referring to such examples, I intend to advocate the notion that ‘dialogue’ between faiths, especially in this region (the Middle East) where one cannot ‘imagine’ one tradition without its interaction and exchange with another, must not be limited to discursive and rational levels of exchange because, as I have modestly attempted to demonstrate, there is an ongoing ‘dialogue’ between different traditions in this region that is participating in the continuous shaping and growth of each religious tradition and its customs. I am tempted to call such an exchange ‘unconscious dialogue’ because it does not occur on a ‘rational’ platform among the people it involves. It is imperative to unearth such anecdotes and examples of enduring exchange that are contemporary and ongoing as we speak in a closely-knit area such as the Middle East if a realistic picture

²⁰ From an interview with Father Elia Khalifeh, researcher at the Center for Antiochian Orthodox Christian Studies and Research at the University of Oxford, 2007.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

is to be constructed of this region in relation to the different religions that co-exist in it. Furthermore, by bringing such unconscious exchange into social consciousness,²⁴ people who are active agents in this exchange can also become conscious agents in appreciating their faith, its contributions, and the influence it receives from other faiths and traditions with which this region is highly endowed.

In this paper, I have attempted to critique the conventional definitions of 'religion' and 'dialogue' in light of contemporary post-colonial discourse in addition to problematizing the abovementioned notions. I have suggested that a socio-historical approach will prove conducive to a better understanding of the interfaith 'reality' of this region where the Middle East, as a space, is approached from an integrative perspective where history is allowed to speak to or enter a dialogue with the present and thus to inhabit it. Such an approach, needless to say, challenges the accepted paradigms of knowledge and promises to deconstruct the accepted boundaries of popular narratives that attempt to understand and define this region.

²⁴ The words 'conscious' and 'unconscious' are not intended in a Freudian or psychoanalytic manner.



Gender and Sexuality in Saadawi's *Two Women in One*

LUMA BALAA

Two Women in One is a novel¹ portraying an Arab Muslim female's quest for her identity and her struggles against the strict patriarchal society surrounding her. Despite the fact that Bahiah comes from a wealthy, educated aristocratic family and is studying medicine, she is oppressed and discriminated against throughout her rite of passage as she grows from childhood and adolescence into adulthood. As the title of the novel *Two Women in One* suggests, Bahiah suffers from a severe internal conflict, which at times keeps her submissive and at other times pushes her to rebel. This essay will examine this conflict and how the protagonist rebels against cultural, religious, economical and political oppression.

Before analyzing the different phases of Bahiah's struggle and rebellion, it is crucial to contextualize the novel in relation to the historical, religious and political setting. To start with, the original Arabic version of this novel was published in 1975, but the English translation followed in 1985 only. Saadawi does not give us an exact historical setting for her novel apart from Cairo, and she makes references to riots and demonstrations against the government. This could have been during President Sadat's time. We are told that many were not happy at the time with the oppressive political regime and she describes poverty, oppression and inequality where many women and men were exploited and abused. In an interview with Lerner (1992), Saadawi admits she was against Sadat's regime along with other oppressive regimes: "All my life I have thought that I am under the pressure of divine power and political power. Sometimes it is visible; when a government like Anwar Sadat's put me in jail, I saw the oppressor. Sometimes it is invisible, like divine power: the tradition, the culture, the education."²

¹ Nawal El-Saadawi, *Two Women in One*, London: Yale University Press 1984.

² George Lerner, "Nawal El-Saadawi", *The Progressive* 56 (1992), 4.

The fact that Saadawi does not give exact details of the historical framework of her novel is intentional because she does not believe that a drastic improvement has occurred. Incidents of oppression and abuse such as inequality, poverty, rape, circumcision, forced marriages and others are still taking place. As for the religious background, the author at times refers to Islam, for example by referring to Muslim names, such as “Mohammad” which is Bahiah’s father’s name; furthermore, Bahiah is reminded of the Islamic “House of Obedience” when she runs away from her husband and refuses to have sex with him. Moreover, other issues are referred to such as prohibition of premarital sex in Islam. Most incidents of women’s oppression take place because of patriarchal traditions and they have nothing to do with religion, such as Bahiah’s forced marriage to a person she does not approve of. Saiti argues: “Most of El-Saadawi’s works emphasize the socio-political realities that govern the lives of Arab women, without foregrounding Islam or religions in the way works by other Arab feminist writers often do.”³

Nevertheless, it is worth arguing that other novels, such as *God Dies by the Nile*, highlight Islam and the way it is used to justify abuse; to summarize, Saadawi comments: “[I]n any society it is not possible to separate religion from the political system, nor to keep sex separate from politics. The trilogy composed of politics, religion and sex, is the most sensitive of all issues in any society. This sensitivity is particularly acute in developing countries with rural background and culture, and where feudal relations are predominant.”⁴

So after examining the political, religious and cultural framework, we can argue that all these factors play a role in Bahiah’s oppression. Saadawi’s protagonist rebels against all three forces since Saadawi argues that “[real] emancipation can only mean freedom from all forms of exploitation[,] whether economic, political, sexual or cultural.”⁵

In the first stage of her life, she faces discrimination in how she is treated by society, so she starts her rebellion by questioning her culture, traditions and religion. This discrimination makes her examine her society and encourages her to defy her parents’ wishes. From her first years, she is made to feel that she is not wanted and her father would have preferred

³ Ramzi Saiti, “Paradise Heaven and Other Oppressive Spaces: A Critical Examination of the Life and Works of Nawal El-Saadawi”, *Journal of Arabic Literature* 25 (1994), 165-166.

⁴ Nawal El-Saadawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World*, London: Zed Press 1990, 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

having a boy instead. Moreover, she spends her childhood in a traumatic state because she finds out that being female is perceived as a tragic and shameful fate. She is made aware of the biological difference between men and women and the stereotypical qualities associated with the sexes. For example, the moment she discovers she is a girl, her mother spans her when she first touches her sexual organs; she is made to swear that she would never touch them again and that they are “evil”.⁶ This is linked to the obsession with virginity and how girls are supposed to look after it. Bahiah feels ashamed of being female and thinks that she has a “wicked” organ in her because she was not circumcised like her sister. She escaped this act by mere chance: the death of Umm Mohammed, the midwife. She even goes so far as to hate God because, according to her, he has created sexual organs which are evil. At this stage, she is attacking religion but only to discover later that it is her culture and traditions that are responsible. It is worth noting that it is only in 1997 that Sheikh al-Azhar⁷ in Egypt declared that circumcision is banned in Islam.

In addition, Simone de Beauvoir contends: “One is not born a woman; one becomes one.”⁸ Girls are conditioned to conform to certain stereotypical “feminine” traits. Bahiah is told that girls must behave differently from boys and should learn to be “feminine” and disregard “masculine” qualities. To illustrate, girls should stand and walk in a certain way but she “[stands] with her right foot on the edge of the marble table and her left foot on the floor, a posture unbecoming for a woman”⁹ and she walks with her knees wide apart. This way of standing or walking is only acceptable for boys or men and her mother scolds her for behaving in such a “disgraceful” manner. Bahiah does not listen to her mother’s orders, and this shows further stages of rebellion against her mother and the stereotypes of the society surrounding her. She questions what is meant by “masculine” and “feminine” and cannot understand the reason why she should conform to such norms. Her mother tells her to stop jumping a lot because she would break something, but she keeps jumping, thereby imitating her brother.

The second stage Bahiah goes through is adolescence, during which her struggle with herself intensifies because of body changes, her social environment and her sexual and cultural oppression, which result in further defiance. She experiences menstruation, rape, physical beating and bulimia.

⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁷ Sheikh al-Azhar al-Tantawi (1928-2010), Grand Imam of the Al-Azhar mosque and head of the Al-Azhar University.

⁸ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, New York: Bantam 1952, 249.

⁹ Saadawi, *Two Women in One*, 7.

On reaching puberty, Bahiah abhors her body, feels disgusted and ashamed of it. In many Arab families, girls are not forewarned about their bodily changes because at times mothers are not comfortable discussing sexuality, which is considered a taboo, or parents are against sex education. Mothers should explain ahead of time what their daughter's sexual bodies are going through so that they know what to expect. Bahiah is terrified, runs away from home and eventually a policeman rapes her. Her father rebukes her, though it is the policeman's and parents' fault. This image of physical abuse is described repetitively and she is constantly beaten up by her father, mother, teacher and later on her husband. She protests: "[t]hey... hit me on account of someone else called Bahiah Shaheen, who [is] obedient and well-behaved."¹⁰ Furthermore, her psychological problems are shown through her eating disorders when her mother over-feeds her and she spits out the food. To make her feel worse, she is deprived of choosing her hobbies and practicing them. In this case, Bahiah adores painting, but her father scolds her every time he sees her doing so. In this sense, her father undervalues her work of art and mocks it. She does not let her father's comments de-motivate her and she secretly draws and paints. So in this case her painting is a form of defiance and expression of her bottled-up anger. Consequently, from an early age she suffers from an identity crisis because even though she is a girl and at times looks like other girls, she never identifies with them: "When she [sees] the other female students, walking with that strange mechanical gait, their legs tightly together, she [realizes] that they [belong] to one species and she to another."¹¹

She walks and sits like men and cannot grasp why women should be treated differently from men; she keeps questioning: "What does it mean to be a girl?" She feels lost in an internal conflict and tries to seek her real identity in a spiritual quest. At times, she is an obedient student who listens to what her father and social environment command; whereas at other times she is a rebel who shatters all norms and resists the patriarchal society around her. She even asks her mother about her identity: "Am I Bahiah?"¹²

As a result of the harshness of her parents and society, Bahiah suffers from fear, isolation, depression and melancholia. Initially, she is petrified to venture out and when someone calls her she remains in hiding. Along with notions of fear, images of loneliness, unhappiness, depression and death are echoed throughout the novel. Bahiah is made to feel like an outsider with no one to support her because she can communicate neither with her mother nor

¹⁰ Ibid., 41.

¹¹ Ibid., 33.

¹² Ibid., 18.

with her father. Her father beats her and her mother cannot understand her; this puzzles her because her mother has been through the same feelings but she seems to have forgotten. When Bahiah asks her once, she says that she does not remember. What is lacking is solidarity between women, especially between mothers and daughters. Also, "Bahiah learns that people deliberately forget real memories and replace them with imaginary ones."¹³ She does not trust her parents and has no real female friends to talk to. Moreover, she does not have a diary to reveal her feelings. When at university, she always sits in a "secluded corner" not mixing with her classmates. In addition, images of melancholia and depression hover around Bahiah and other females. For instance, one of the girls wishes that the dead body on the dissecting table were hers; however, when Bahiah asks her if she wants to die, she denies that. Her explanation is that she is scared to reveal her true feelings and prefers to keep them inhibited. "Bahiah now [understands] the tragedy. She [knows] why human beings hide their real desires, because they are strong enough to be destructive; and since people do not want to be destroyed, they opt for a passive life with no real desires."¹⁴ At times, since she is unhappy, she wishes for or dreams of death. Before she meets Saleem, her future lover, she considers killing herself and thinks that suicide is not a crime, but that someone killing her without her consent is. Here, she might be referring to her metaphorical death where she feels crushed by the patriarchal society around her.

Sexual harassment is another way by the means of which a girl is discriminated against in patriarchal societies such as these. To begin with, Bahiah is sexually harassed by her classmates and teacher, and by boys, women and men on the street. It is acceptable to stare at a woman and usually most women avoid walking alone on the streets as a result. Her teacher, Dr. Alawi, whom she trusts and goes to for comfort, attempts to rape her. She also describes the male students at college pushing and elbowing each other at times touching the girls' breasts on purpose. "When an elbow [edges] sneakily into a girl student's breast, her lips would part almost imperceptibly. With an inaudible suppressed whisper the girl ... [says] 'Ah...' and [places] her bulging satchel protectively over her chest."¹⁵

Furthermore, teenagers expose themselves to her and men stare, laugh and tell dirty jokes. She walks in a confident manner and "[fights] her way through stares, noise, and obscene remarks. She [raises] her black eyes and [purses] her lips in anger, defying fate."¹⁶

¹³ Ibid., 12.

¹⁴ Ibid., 34.

¹⁵ Ibid., 23.

¹⁶ Ibid., 120.

In the third phase of her growing up, she reaches adulthood and her rebellious self wins over her submissive one, attacking parental, patriarchal, economical, cultural, religious and political types of oppression. This is when she discovers what she really wants in life and what gives her joy. She is forced by her parents to study medicine even though she doesn't want to become a doctor. She tells herself that this is not the future she has in mind and later discovers that she loves art and organizes an exhibition of her paintings. Selling her paintings makes her financially independent, which gives her self-confidence. She finds self-fulfillment in art and can express her sorrow and release the tension of oppression. She also finds her true love and this gives meaning to her life. The climax stage of rebellion is when she has premarital sex. In many Muslim countries this is considered unacceptable, and in many places arranged marriages are still practiced; many women are not allowed to choose their own husbands. She meets Saleem, a classmate, who admires and values her paintings and who declares his love for her. He is "extremely unpatriarchal ...[,] mystical... [and acts as a] catalyst in her progress toward selfhood."¹⁷ When she encounters him, she feels she is not herself but another, a devilish person. Additionally, she despises her old self since she realizes her weakness and passivity.

She [can] see her defects all too clearly. She [hates] that polite obedient voice. She [is] irritated by that placid look which [does] not see things, but [allows] them to be reflected from her, like a watery surface. She [hates] that nose which [is] not sufficiently upturned. She [despises] that paleness, whose real cause she [knows]. It [is] the paleness of a complexion drained of blood by fear, a fear that people seek to hide...¹⁸

At the beginning, she is terrified of succumbing to her desires, but when Saleem asks her if she is afraid of death, she answers that death does not exist and that she is afraid of life itself. Saleem does not force himself upon her and displays his interest in her. Later on, she runs away from him because she senses her tragic ending and foreshadows her own destruction. Saleem leaves her when he finds her hesitant and accuses her of being scared of love. Nevertheless, she eventually has premarital sex with him. She is seeking adventure and change from her monotonous planned life. For a certain period, Bahiah feels content while she is with him, but once he mentions their unborn baby which she might be carrying in the future, she feels guilty and starts imagining her father's reaction once he will hear

¹⁷ Diana Royer, *A Critical Study of the Works of Nawal El-Saadawi, Egyptian Writer and Activist*, Ontario: The Edwin Mellen Press 2001, 57.

¹⁸ Saadawi, *Two Women in One*, 37.

that she has lost her virginity and disobeyed him. Saleem does not ask for her hand in marriage but might have intended to do so; unfortunately, he gets imprisoned immediately after. It is important to note that until now in many Middle Eastern cultures an unmarried woman who loses her virginity is often condemned and looked down upon. At that stage, Bahiah is punished twice: once by her conscience and again by her environment; she prefers to die rather than face her parents. Moreover, she and Saleem participate in a student uprising and get imprisoned as a result. When her father takes her out, she leaves one prison and enters another, that of parental authority. Her parents force her to marry, but she runs away again. Then she is coerced to leave university because, according to her family, “[u]niversities corrupt girls’ morals” and “marriage is the strongest protection for girls’ morals.”¹⁹ She cannot go back to school without her parents’ support because she lacks the financial means at that moment. The patriarchal society, represented by her father, teacher, and uncle, controls her life. Mainly, she feels that it is her father who is hindering her from being her own self. “Her father [stands] like a vast, high barrier between her and her real self”²⁰ and he is her fate, the one “who [owns] her just as he [owns] his underwear. He might or might not educate her, for he [is] the one who [pays] the fees. He could marry her off or not marry her off, for he [is] the broker, even though she [has] never authorized him.”²¹ She even portrays her father as a prison guard and her house as a prison. Likewise, her father resembles all men and this is symbolic of the patriarchal society as a whole. “In the distance she [sees] a man who [looks] just like other men.”²² He calls her, and only then it turns out that he is her father. What is ironic is that at times, she says that she loves her father despite all the harshness, and that she appreciates his hard work for his family. Thus, it can be concluded that she is not upset with him personally but with the patriarchal society that is forcing him to act the way he does.

This oppression reaches its peak when her parents make her realize that she does not even get to choose her own spouse and is forced to get married. She is not permitted to experience love and compelled to marry her cousin, who is a business school graduate whom she does not love. Later on, when she is caught by the police for participating in a student uprising, she is “sold” for three hundred Egyptian pounds to Mohammad Yassin without her approval. She informs us that at her wedding, other females

¹⁹ Ibid., 95.

²⁰ Ibid., 27.

²¹ Ibid., 96.

²² Ibid., 15.

remember their own weddings with misery because they were “sold” off as well. On becoming a wife, Bahiah becomes her husband’s sexual property whereby he has the right to rape her. On her wedding night, she resists her husband’s rape and kicks him in the stomach. While he sleeps she escapes and is later on reminded of “the house of obedience” where a husband can force his wife to return to him. Her husband compares her to prostitutes he has had sex with before. She describes how in the morning after her escape her whole family is put to shame because they did not find blood on the bed sheets. First, both men and women should remain virgins until the day they are married according to Islam as mentioned in verse 35 of Sūrat al-ahzāb (33), the Confederates, of the Holy Koran: “Men and women who have surrendered, believing men and believing women, obedient men and obedient women, truthful men and truthful women.... men and women who guard their private parts... for them God has prepared forgiveness and a mighty wage.”²³ Second, customs only punish women because “[a]ccording to Egyptian law, if a man is caught in sexual intercourse with a prostitute he is not put in jail, but is used as a witness against her, whereas she is sentenced to a term of imprisonment”.²⁴

In the final phase of her journey, she rebels against the government, gets re-imprisoned and becomes an outcast; meanwhile she discovers her true self and becomes aware of the restrictions her social environment forced on her. Because she has had premarital sex, slept outside her home, defied the government and ran away from her husband, she becomes an outcast and cannot return to her parents. She seeks shelter at Saleem’s flat and continues painting along with getting involved with further actions against the government. Unfortunately, despite the fact that she can support herself financially, she cannot survive this patriarchal world and eventually is caught again after running away. However, when they take her to prison she says: “Let’s go”. She is confident and bravely gives them her wrists to be handcuffed; she cannot face being away from the man she loves and she cannot tolerate living in humiliation. Bahiah’s character develops and she unravels her true self. She notices that most women are discriminated against and are socialized to act according to certain stereotypes. She eventually overcomes her other trained self which is controlled by society and parental authority. Besides, she notices that it is not just her who suffers from this conflict, but most other females as well. They are afraid to reveal their true feelings, which shows in their suppressed laughs. Bahiah realizes

²³ Arthur J. Arberry (transl.), *The Koran Interpreted*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1983, 431.

²⁴ Saadawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve*, 4.

that some humans, especially women, work hard at suppressing their strong “real” desires. They seem to be living fake lives to the extent that they forget what their “real” selves are like: “... People don’t want a real person. They’re used to faking everything, including themselves, and in the end they forget what their real selves are like. When they see a real person they panic and many even try to kill him/[her]. That’s why such a person will always be hunted down, killed, condemned to death, imprisoned or isolated somewhere far from other people.”²⁵

Here, Saadawi is referring mainly to women who live false lives and to the society that destroys them if they try to be honest about their feelings. Now, Bahiah comprehends why some women tolerate discrimination and live passive lives – because anyone who tries to rebel will be destroyed. If a girl does not follow the patriarchal norms, she is considered “abnormal”. The narrator examines and deconstructs what is meant by a “normal” girl: “ ‘Not normal’. And what do they consider a normal girl? One with beaten eyes who walks with closely-bound legs, obedient and submissive, with amputated sexual organs? One who drips with perfumed powders and paints, saturated day and night with sad songs and sex films? One who knows romantic stories by heart and can’t really experience anything? The virtuous and pure virgin preoccupied with removing body hair and enticing men?”²⁶

They are deprived of their basic rights, silenced and abused which creates frustration, makes them feel depressed and destroys their lives. Bahiah initially represents those females who suffer from this conflict: accepting the patriarchy and its abuse, or standing up and rebelling.

Through her education and medical studies, Bahiah is unlike many of the other Saadawi heroines. As she notices the types of oppression in her society, she discovers ‘the truth’ about her society and is able to rebel. As Malti-Douglas (1995) comments, the woman doctor is one of El-Saadawi’s prototype characters who, being upper-class, are able to rebel against their societies to seek liberation.²⁷ At this stage it is worth pointing out that most of Saadawi’s heroines rebel whether they are educated or not; for example, both Zakeya²⁸, an illiterate farmer, and Firdaus²⁹, a high school graduate, avenge their oppressors. Nevertheless, by presenting Bahiah as being educated and

²⁵ Saadawi, *Two Women in One*, 68.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 112.

²⁷ Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Men and Women, and God(s). Nawal El-Saadawi and Arab Feminist Poetics*, Los Angeles: University of California Press 1995, 20.

²⁸ Nawal El-Saadawi, *God Dies by the Nile*, London: Zed Books 1985.

²⁹ Nawal El-Saadawi, *Women at Point Zero*, London: Zed Books 1991.

middle-class, the author is shattering the stereotypical images of Arab women among Arabs and Westerners. Her being educated makes her more keen on understanding herself and her society, paving the way for her independence and rebellion. She can question the status of her gender, country, and government; she can participate in government riots and voice her opinion through political discussions and leaflets. Zeidan (1995) claims that: "In the end, she turns herself in to authorities not to make a political statement or rebel against repressive rule, but rather because she wants to be with Salim, who is in prison. Her ostensible search for a collective political identity thus seems artificial and imposed by the author, and it constitutes another example of the weak character development, typical of al-Saadawi's earlier works."³⁰

Though Zeidan is right in arguing that part of the reason Bahiah hands in herself is because she cannot tolerate living without her true love, I refute the part about her not making a political statement. Throughout the novel there are references to the abuse by the government and we are told that despite Saleem's absence, she continues to take action against the government. She even sees a link between herself and the status of all of Egypt, both of which are oppressed. While marching, she shouts: "Egypt shall be free!"³¹, so here her identity seems to merge with all of Egypt and humanity. "She [has] the strange sensation of blending into the larger world, of becoming part of the infinite extended body of humanity."³² Furthermore, Bahiah's character develops gradually. Unlike Zeidan's suggestion, she does not have a weak character development because we see early signs of rebellion which build up eventually.

Despite the fact that becoming educated has opened up her mind, she is still a prisoner of patriarchy. She does not choose to study medicine and was forced to do so by her parents. Even though a woman might gain knowledge and power when studying medicine, the patriarchal society still treats her in the same way as it treats uneducated women. At first sight, one might argue that her father making her study medicine is a step toward women's liberation since many women are not allowed to continue their education. However, this does not prevent him from practicing his authority over and oppression of her, which is proven by him stopping her from finishing her studies. Furthermore, as Valassopoulos (2004) argues in her article "'Words Written by a Pen Sharp as a Scalpel': Gender and Medical Practice in the Early Fiction of Nawal El-Saadawi and Fatmata Conteth", in the early

³⁰ Joseph Zeidan, *Arab Women Novelists: The Formative Years and Beyond*, State University of New York Press 1995,162.

³¹ Saadawi, *Two Women in One*, 82.

³² *Ibid.*, 82.

nineteenth century, midwives were very common and this was not a new career for women. Valassopoulos adds that even the medical profession itself as portrayed in the early fiction of El-Saadawi and Conteth is loaded with sexism and gender inequality.³³ So in the long run, Saadawi's medical career did not aid her to abolish patriarchy; as a result, she resorts to writing. She explains her attitude in *Two Women in One* where Bahiah chooses art over medicine, and in *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*³⁴ in which the protagonist gives up medical practice. However, education is one of the solid bases for liberation along with financial independence. A girl can work and support herself financially if her parents or spouse allow her to do so. Though Bahiah does not graduate from university, she is able to support herself financially by selling her paintings. When Saleem is in prison and she has run away from home, she proves for a while that she can live alone and support herself.

Saadawi has been accused of exaggerating when she describes the oppression of Arab women and has been blamed for ignoring the achievements of many Egyptian women, but in this novel she is trying to show us that despite the fact that the protagonist comes from a middle class family, she is still oppressed. Whoever rebels is attacked. There are even slight biographical references in *Two Women in One*, mainly her being forced to study medicine by her parents, her participation in riots against the government, and her being imprisoned. Indeed, crucial factors which play a role in the degree of woman's oppression are class and education. Of course, the oppression is different from that of female farmers. For example, the female farmers in *God Dies by the Nile* are made to work as slaves, they are over-worked and raped. However, what is striking in these novels is that most protagonists are tragic heroines who are controlled by "powerful forces" and face either death or imprisonment. No matter how hard we try, the case remains. This is Madhhuchanda's approach in her article "Angry Eyes and Closed Lips: Forces of Revolution in Nawal El-Saadawi's *God Dies by the Nile*". She believes that the "revolutionary impact of Zakeya's hoe that kills the Mayor does not seem to touch the village. Zakeya goes to prison, the novel ends, and Kafr El Teen remains consigned to its silence of death."³⁵ At least, she takes revenge for her sisters, and even if other tyrants

³³ Anastasia Valassopoulos, "'Words Written by a Pen Sharp as a Scalpel': Gender and Medical Practice in the Early Fiction of Nawal El-Saadawi and Fatmata Conteth", *Research in African Literatures*, 35 (2004), 87-107.

³⁴ Nawal El-Saadawi, *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*, London: Saqi Books 1988.

³⁵ Madhhuchanda Mitra, "Angry Eyes and Closed Lips: Forces of Revolution in Nawal El-Saadawi's *God Dies by the Nile*" in: *Violence, Silence, and Anger: Women's Writing as Transgression*, Deirdre Lashgari, ed., Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia 1995, 147-57.

come along, one has to keep fighting. On the other hand, it is vital that their death or imprisonment is seen as a positive note in that some women are willing to die for women's liberation. It is interesting to note the possible effect of such rebellious actions on oppressed female readers. They might identify with the heroines, and that could have a catharsis effect. Moreover, Saadawi's message is that unless a drastic sacrifice is exerted, change will not take place. Perhaps many women would have to pay a price in order to achieve change. In *Women at Point Zero*³⁶,

Firdaus is a martyr, a model of fighting to the last moment. She challenged the government, the president, the whole system, and paid with her life. Death makes her much more alive than if she had stayed. If Firdaus had signed the petition (for presidential clemency) and survived, if she had said pardon me, nobody would write about her. I admire her because few people are ready to face death for a principle.³⁷

Among Saadawi's protagonists, Firdaus suffers the most, and when at the beginning we see a prostitute who murders her pimp, our initial reaction might be to look down upon her with disgust because she is selling her body and committing murder. Nevertheless, once we hear her story, our reaction changes and we salute her courage and strength. She is raped several times, prevented from continuing her studies, and forced into prostitution. Saadawi makes us look more deeply at the causes that force this woman to be a prostitute.

So Bahiah is one of these female protagonists who are willing to pay the price for their freedom. To summarize, she suffers from patriarchal oppression despite coming from an educated middle-class family. This essay has examined in detail the conflict she goes through due to the clash between her real self and the identity her society tries to impose on her. At the end, she finds her real identity and rebels against oppression in all its forms: patriarchal, cultural, religious, economical and political. As a conclusion, in the Preface to this novel Saadawi calls the young to struggle, to resist and not to give up:

“To all young men and women, that they may realize, before it is too late, that the path of love is not strewn with roses, that when flowers first bloom in the sun they are assaulted by swarms of bees that suck their tender petals, and that if they do not fight back they will be destroyed. But if they resist, if they turn their tender petals into sharp protruding thorns, they can survive among hungry bees.”³⁸

³⁶ Saadawi, *Point Zero*.

³⁷ Lerner, “Saadawi”, 4.

³⁸ Saadawi, *Two Women in One*, 5.

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Patterns of discrimination and tolerance in the Middle East are discussed in this volume by scholars from various fields such as history, literature, philosophy, educational studies, cultural studies, psychology, and women's studies. It is the editors' intention to stimulate also local debates on these critical issues. The principal themes of the contributions include race and migration, religious (in-)tolerance, gender relations, cultural differences or convergent traditions. Whereas the region is enjoying new leeway due to the emergence of the media, especially social media, discourses on cultural diversity remain an issue that needs our support.