The issue of PLURALISM AND THE CITIZENSHIP

values promotion in the Arab world

The social, cultural and religious fabric in the Arab world is characterized by great diversity and overlap that reflects the extent of the richness that the Arab world enjoys. However, this diversity in social and religious structures may be a cause of division in the event of the ability to manage this plurality and manage ideological, religious and ethnic differences; and then the diversity that characterizes it turns into a major weakness of those societies rather than being an addition to them.

In the following, we review the features of pluralism in the Arab world and the problems related to it, how to deal and exploit it in an optimal way, and we review the extent to which citizenship values are applied in the Arab world.

First: the features of pluralism in the Arab world

The Arab region is distinguished by a basic feature, which is that it is a region in which affiliations vary, whether in terms of the multiplicity of ethnic, linguistic, and cultural entities within the same society, where the majority consists of Arab Muslims of the Sunni and Shiite sects, and all other groups fall under the name of minorities.

The Arab world can be divided into three patterns of homogeneity, as follows:

1. The most homogeneous countries:

There are eight countries in which the percentage of ethnic groups is less than 15%, which are Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Jordan, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Somalia, we can say that the vast majority of the population of these countries is very homogeneous ethnically in terms of being Arabs in language and culture, Muslims in religion and Sunnis in sect.

2. Medium Homogeneous Countries:

The term "medium homogeneity" means those countries that contain ethno-linguistic, religious, sectarian, or ancestral formations, amounting to between 15% and 25% of the total population. It includes five countries: Kuwait, the Emirates, Oman, Syria, and Algeria.

3. The most diverse countries:

There are nine Arab countries in which the size of diversity reaches great levels, due to the large size of the ethnic groups that make up it, with a population of more than 35% of the population, which are: Iraq, Bahrain, Syria, Lebanon, Mauritania, Yemen, Sudan, Djibouti and Morocco. In these countries, there is no numerical majority for any Athenian group, as is the case in both Iraq and Lebanon.
Almost every country in the Arab world has at least one ethnic minority, and one of the most prominent of these ethnicities[1]:

A. The Kurds: It is the largest ethnic minority in the world, and despite this, they do not have a private state or a unified political entity recognized by the whole world. The Kurds in our Arab world are distributed between the countries of Syria and Iraq, and the number of Kurds in the world is estimated at about 27 million, of whom about 6 million are in Syria and Iraq.

B. The Shiites: Despite the large presence of the Shiites in Iraq and their control over the political situation, there are countries in which the Shiites are present as a minority, including Saudi Arabia, and they are also present in Bahrain and represent a large percentage of the population, but they do not enjoy the full rights that other Sunnis have, in addition to their presence in the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait.

C. Berber and Amazigh: Berbers are distributed as a minority group in the Maghreb countries, where they represent 40% of the population of Morocco, 30% of the population of Algeria, 5% of the population of Tunisia and 10% of the population of Libya.

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[1] Dr. Ali Khalifa Al Kuwari. The concept of citizenship in the nation–state, Arab Future Magazine, No. 2, Center for Arab Unity Studies, Beirut, 2001

D. The Alawites: it is one of the Shiite sects, the Alawites are concentrated in the Syrian coastal mountains, and their number is estimated at about 11.5% of the total population in Syria.

E. The Druze: It is a religious sect with followers in each of Syria about 700,000 people, Lebanon about 250,000 people, in Palestine about a 1,000 people, and in Jordan about 20,000 people.

Second: What are the demands of the ethnic groups in the Arab region?

Ethnic groups often raise demands for their children related to the political system in which they live and the society to which they belong. These demands include affirming their identity and respect by representing them in the political system or granting them a special status in the country. The more the ethnic group's values, identity, and representation in society diverge, the more it tends to rebellion and separatism. Language, religion, customs and traditions are usually the most present topics in ethnic demands and may extend to the country's national anthem, city names and various symbols in the country.

The national identities of modern countries were formed on the basis of the selection of certain elements and the absence of those that do not respond to the political needs of the country at the stage of its formation, and in the interests of the dominant class at that stage. For example, with regard to the Kurds, the absence of the Kurdish element from the institutions after independence and the selection of the elements of Arabism and the national dimension as the country's identity all these manifestations fuel the demands of these minorities for a real representation to be expressed. And also for the Shiites in Bahrain, where they represent more than 60% of the population, and the protests of 2011 were in order to object to discrimination in their right to work places and public services, and those protests witnessed demands for a constitutional monarchy through which a government chosen by an elected parliament would be formed[2].

It is clear from the map of ethnic conflicts in the Arab world that religious, cultural and social diversity and pluralism are not optimally exploited, as it is the focus of conflict in a number of countries or a major threat to the unity of countries. The more the ethnic group's values and identity are in harmony with the national public identity in society and the ruling authority, the greater the integration.

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(2)   Asmaa and Attar Abdul Majeed, The Issue of Minorities in the Arab World Between Reality and Hope, Eliza Journal for Research and Studies, 2021

On the contrary, the greater the divergence of the group's values and identity in society, the less it is represented and leads to an increase in the group's tendency to go out and rebel against those values[3].

The failure of the modern national state in managing ethnic and cultural pluralism is mainly due to the failure of the successive authorities operating in the fields of power, culture and economy. It is a failure in which ethnic pluralism did not play a role, as many countries claim, by blaming national ethnos. Rather, it is mainly due to the exclusion of citizenship, which led to the failure of the cohesion of the state-producing political group through the regression of citizens to their narrow sectarian and ethnic identities and sub-cultures. When the country fails to recognize its citizens as equals, they will fall back in search of recognition, which has led to the revival of sub-identities at the expense of national identity.

Third: Is it possible to manage this diversity?

The management of diversity in most Arab countries has become one of the main issues in the Arab world in light of the existing ethnic conflicts that have led to the rupture of some countries. Therefore, this cultural, religious and social diversity needs good management[4]so that this diversity is well exploited to maximize the capabilities of those countries. The objectives of managing this diversity are:
- Fighting the sources and manifestations of divisive ideas in all aspects of social life.
- Supporting the values of tolerance, cooperation and coexistence in the younger generations, which have proven on many occasions the ability of young people to find common gray areas for dialogue away from the mentality of previous generations based on black and white and where there is no place for moderation.

- Building the national community and working towards transcending narrow loyalties to work together under a common goal of ensuring stability and developing the country.

- Ensuring a degree of individual freedom, which includes freedom of belief, opinion and expression and the use of the Internet without supervision.

- Freedom of ethnic and religious minorities and historically excluded minorities to practice their religion and culture and to participate equally in political and social life.

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[3] Hussein Musa, Determinants of Ethnic and Sectarian Division in the Arab World, Arab Democratic Center, 2020,
        https://democraticac.de/?p=65794

[4] Center for Conflict Studies and Humanitarian Action and the Institute for Peace Research in Oslo, Conflict Trends in the Arab World
        (1946–2019), 2021

- Reducing the spread of the culture of ethnic hatred in a way that replaces the thought of the struggle of opposites between "us" and "them" to an interactive and participatory thought of the need of these societies for democracy, development, justice, and the consolidation of citizenship values and institutions.

- Respect diversity and accept the consequent disagreement or difference in values.

- Providing equal opportunities for education and jobs for all groups and wasting wealth.

Fourth: Citizenship as a basis for managing pluralism

Citizenship is the characteristic of a citizen, which defines his national rights and duties. The individual knows his rights and performs his duties through national education. Citizenship is characterized by a special kind of loyalty of the citizen to his country and his service in times of peace and war and cooperation with other citizens through institutional and individual official and voluntary work in achieving the goals that everyone aspires to and for which efforts are unified, plans are drawn and budgets are drawn up, and citizenship has several dimensions, including [5].

1- The legal dimension: It is certain that citizenship is primarily a legal status, and this status includes above all the right to vote and to be elected, but it is also a set of rights and freedoms that must be enjoyed by citizens without restrictions other than those imposed by society. Citizenship legally means the relationship of the individual with the country as a geographical and political fact that is determined and governed by the constitutional and legal texts that define, on the basis of equality, the different rights of individuals and the duties that they have towards society and the means through which rights are enjoyed and duties are fulfilled. The (nationality) bond is usually a basic criterion for determining who is a citizen, and based on it, political, civil, economic and social rights and duties follow….

2- The Social dimension: The point of identifying an individual with a citizen is belonging to a group of individuals (citizens) in a specific geographical area that is recognized internally and externally, and belonging is an attempt to form identity and then loyalty according to the understanding of that identity.

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(5) Zaher Mohsen Hani Al-Jubouri, The concept of citizenship among university students, a field study for students of the University of Babylon, Babylon University Journal / Human Sciences / Volume 18 / 2010

3- The cultural-behavioral dimension: The practice of the principle of citizenship on the ground is closely related to the prevailing cultural system within society. Customs, values, traditions, and social norms work unconsciously to integrate one-self into social life according to special conditions determined by the group, and thus define rights and duties and practice them on the ground.

4- The political dimension: Today, citizenship seems closer to a civic behavioral pattern and to an active and daily participation in the life of society than it is a legal status related to the granting of citizenship. A good citizen participates in public life in all its details; and this situation includes the freedom to form parties, the right to demonstrate, sit in, and contribute to the formation of the political system.

Fifth: Towards effective policies to enhance citizenship

The importance of citizenship and its promotion in the Arab world comes in light of the great crises that the Arab world is going through and the great challenges facing the national state, such as the dangers of division, rebellion, and the exploitation of minority issues by external parties. Therefore, the coming period needs real policies to enhance and enable the Arab citizen to acquire citizenship in thought and practice[6]. Therefore, we should work on:
- Develop policies and mechanisms for its implementation so that all minorities are granted economic, social, cultural and political rights.
- Ending all forms of discrimination against minorities, as this is the main entrance to ethnic conflicts.
- Providing equality for members of minorities and allowing them to participate in political life.
- Working on strengthening civil society institutions.
- Work to strengthen institutions and enhance governance in a balanced manner from all groups without prejudice to one of the ethnicities in order to deal impartially with issues of concern to these different ethnic groups.

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(6) Adnan Al-Sayed Hussein, Citizenship in the Arab World, Arab Thought Forum, Rabat 2008