

Diversity in the Arab region between

PLURALISM AND DOMINANT CULTURE

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Introduction

When talking about pluralism in the Arab region, the first thing that usually comes to mind is the religious and sectarian diversity among the region's population. The region that witnessed the emergence of three major religions, religion occupies a large space in the thinking and determinants of its population's vision of the world. Since the Arab Spring, many initiatives and movements have emerged, whether from governments, civil society or political parties, aiming to activate citizenship and support diversity. However, many of them have taken the same base as a starting point for their work, which is the relationship between followers of different religions or sects.

Despite the relevance and importance of these efforts, pluralism and citizenship are not just legal frameworks and organizations that guarantee equality and non-discrimination between the different, or between the majority and minorities. With regard to culture, especially the cultures of minorities, whether they are religious, ethnic, political, or otherwise, preserving and supporting these cultures is one of the greatest pillars of social peace, and in many historical experiences in peoples' struggle towards equality, the cultural dimension was the starting point for social peace.

For example, African Americans waged a legal and peaceful struggle for decades in order to establish constitutional and legal frameworks that would guarantee them equality, and they succeeded in that, but their music was a Trojan horse that brought them into the heart of American culture until it became part of the general culture, which contributed positively to strengthening their civil, social and political rights.



Many political regimes believe that the existence of a single cultural line that dominates society is the best for social peace and political stability, especially in the countries of the Middle East, where the ethnic dimension is often a religious dimension. These regimes often try to adopt cultural determinants that are usually the cultural determinants of the majority of the population, and reinforce those determinants at the expense of minority cultures, but experience has proven the opposite. Minorities usually struggle to preserve their culture, and other dimensions usually interfere with that culture that reinforce the conflict, which may amount to armed conflict, such as the struggle between the “ETA” movement and the Spanish government for the independence of the Basque Country, which is a conflict of the cultural dimension occupies a large part of its causes⁽¹⁾.

Many ruling regimes may adopt coercive assimilationist policies with the aim of imposing one dominant culture in an attempt to achieve social stability, as it is from the point of view of those governments that these policies are more effective and less costly than promoting diversity and supporting minority cultures on the one hand, and on the other hand it often results from fear of the majority and their loss as supportive political blocs. However, in the long run, this approach of cultural hegemony policies results in damage to social peace and the stability of states.

The problem of the relationship between local political systems and the international system:

In the aftermath of World War II, in an attempt to make it the last of the major wars, it was agreed between the victorious countries to establish a legal and institutional international system to include all countries of the world in order to find peaceful frameworks for resolving disputes between countries, and to support the countries of the world in order to achieve the well-being of people in an attempt to reduce the causes of armed conflicts.

Despite the attempts of the makers of the international system to include all sources of global culture and legislation, of course, the political, social and cultural imagination that dominated the formulation of the foundations and principles of that system belonged largely to the victorious countries of the West in the war. Here we are not trying to evaluate those values and standards that later became called human values and standards that all countries and societies in the East and West are supposed to abide by. Rather, we are trying to study the impact of the uniqueness of Western values and standards in defining universal values on countries that do not belong to the same cultural, political, social, and economic crucible.

(1) What do you know about the Basque “ETA” movement, Al Jazeera, September 18, 2014
<https://shorturl.at/aouw2>



Although this global system of values and laws stemmed in its philosophy from laws, customs, religions and the global human heritage in general⁽²⁾. However, the status of adherents of many cultures, religions and mores in the second post-war era. Which can be described as weak or marginalized as a result of their weak influence in the global conflict at the time on the one hand, or their deep preoccupation with their local issues, especially the formation of the political essence of their countries or their struggle for independence on the other hand. In addition to the fact that many of those countries and civilizations were basically subject to occupation by the victorious countries, all of these factors, in addition to the victory in the war, made the Western countries address the establishment of the world order according to their individual vision.

As a result, the victors quickly divided themselves into two camps, western and eastern, each with its own cultural components, and its social, political and economic characteristics, which were formed through centuries of internal interactions, so it was unacceptable for any of the two camps to give up those distinctive characteristics of it in favor of victory for the other camp.

Although what emerges most from the disagreement between the eastern and western camps during the Cold War period is the economic orientation and the vision of each party on how to manage and operate economic activity, even the economic orientation is the creation of cultural interactions within each camp. The West, in which the individual is the basis of society, and his personal development is the basis for the development of the state, in addition to the nature of the state's organizing role for society in the first place, which are the foundations that resulted in political and economic theories that promote democracy, market freedom, upholding human rights and individual freedom. Which are the values that collide with the eastern standards that elevate the role of the state, the value of the political system, and the generality of economic activity, and give importance to the group at the expense of the individual.

Perhaps Russia and the countries that revolved around it in what was known as the Soviet Union were luckier than many countries in the world, especially in Africa and the Middle East, as it emerged from the war victorious and has its strong ideology that its people gathered around⁽³⁾, while the countries of the Middle East were still groping for their way, either newly independent or still striving for independence after centuries of successive occupations, starting from the Ottomans, passing through the British, French, and Italians.

(2) Sources of International Law, United Nations
https://legal.un.org/avl/pdf/ls/greenwood_outline.pdf

(2) Rósa Magnúsdóttir, The Soviet Side of the Cultural Cold War, Wilson Center, September 23, 2019
<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/the-soviet-side-the-cultural-cold-war>

The occupation was an obstacle to the ability of the people of the region to crystallize their own ideology economically, politically, and socially, so they adopted the ideologies of the East and the West, in addition to religion as the main component in the culture of the people of the region. And the followers of each ideology team became in conflict with the followers of other ideologies, in light of the alienation of the majority of the population in front of those ideologies in general, and the minorities in many of these conflicts were fuel for them, as they are usually accused by each team of being the back door to the ideology of the other team. The Shiites are the gateway to the values of the Iranian Islamic revolution in the region, and the Maronites are the European Christians' gateway to it, and so on. However, it also includes a number of values that are not related to the culture of the majority of the population, and in order to overcome this problem, a great political movement and interaction must occur within the societies of those countries, in order to become values such as equality, freedom of belief, peaceful transfer of power, positive participation, and other values stemming from real interactions and not just imported slogans.

Cultural marginalization and the danger it poses to states:

One of the most prominent results of cultural marginalization and the most dangerous for countries is the outbreak of civil wars. Civil wars are more harmful to states and peoples than wars between states, as all the victims are among its population, and all losses are from its capabilities. Perhaps Lebanon is the most blatant example in the Arab region of the scourge of civil wars and their consequences for the Lebanese people themselves.

Cultural marginalization, which some may consider a subsidiary issue, is one of the biggest causes of societal alienation of cultural minorities, and is the main driver for their adoption of intra-national policies that increase their agglomeration and self-interdependence, and enhance their separation from society, and the feeling of separation, even if it started morally, but it cannot be guaranteed that it will not develop into a material, political, social, and economic desire.

On the other hand, the moral separation or self-isolation of minorities would transform any normal quarrel between a citizen of the minorities and another of the majority into a societal conflict similar to tribal wars in the past, where minorities feel that they have all been attacked in the person of the citizen belonging to them, as the majority feels the same.



Politically, the adoption of exclusionary policies and legislation by states would lead to international isolation or the imposition of sanctions⁽⁴⁾, especially if the state does not possess economic resources, military power, or diplomatic and political weight, which makes other countries overlook this approach, in the face of achieving its interests.

Conclusion:

Cultural marginalization and attempts to dominate one culture and imbue societies with it. Although it seems too many to be a secondary issue, it is more dangerous than these perceptions. Although cultural marginalization is one of the results of the majority's attempts to paint its reality in a manner appropriate to it socially, culturally, politically, and economically, the mere fact that the majority is the majority does not in any way mean the marginalization of minorities and the eradication of their culture and characteristics.

When minorities are marginalized, it is in an automatic reaction that they resort to self-isolation, in an attempt to derive strength and safety from that cohesion, as well as to create an in-between framework for practicing their culture with some freedom. This situation leads to the alienation of minorities within their societies on the one hand, and on the other hand creates a state of ambiguity and suspicion among the majority towards minorities.

Although these data are moral, this is only in their initial phase, as it prevents them from turning into practices that may be in the form of physical or moral violence. A small act may be a quarrel between a member of the minority and another of the majority, then that individual quarrel may turn into a wide conflict. International experiences indicate that there are many procedures and policies that have been followed and led to positive results and reduced the gap between the culture of the majority and the cultures of minorities. Recognizing the language of minorities as one of the official languages of the state, respecting the rituals of minorities, enhancing their freedom in their practices, recognizing their special holidays and events, preserving the heritage of minorities, as well as ensuring political and functional representation, are policies that have been proven by experience to enhance social peace, which is reflected in the political and economic performance positively.

(4) The European Union's Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime, European Union website, December 7, 2020
<https://shorturl.at/dqy04>

