UPHEAVALS AND MINORITY FEARS IN THE ARAB WORLD

[**Issue Number 83 - January 2013**](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/83-d)

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**Reflecting on the Problem**

Arab elite recently said: «Merely by their solidarity as religious groups (the different religious sects), they create fear in me. I could become secure only through the solidarity and security of my own group. The history of sectarian bloodshed in the region does not encourage me to feel at ease». On that way of thinking hangs the clue to this article. If the need to feel secure is a fundamental human requirement, it is, as indicated in the statement, attained in considerable measure by belonging to group that is in turn secure.

In trying to deal with minorities and to explore individual’s political identifications and affiliations to groups, answers are not to be found solely in the psychology of group juxtapositions, and they could not be understood without psychologically taking account of the cognitive and emotional concomitants of individual traits and interactions. To pose purely objective inquiries, such as whether increasing inter-group contact accelerates or retards individuals’ separate identities, is to miss the decisive impact of the quality of that contact[[1]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftn1" \o "). It is also to ignore instead of attending carefully to what individuals say about themselves and others. Without antipathy (opposition in feeling), there can be no individual identity or group affiliation.

Social-psychology readings reflect that the self is mainly delimited, incomprehensibly identified, in terms of both relative positive images of whom we are and negative images of whom we are not. Self - identity, in other words, is constituted by the rising knowledge of the self as well as the «not - self». Group identity, in particular, is constituted both by positive identification with one’s group and by negative identification with the other groups. What is the relationship between these two sources of identity? If the self is well grounded in positive images, might it rely less on sustaining a negative other?

Aversion among individuals of different groups can cause fear as much as it is a result of fear. By the same token, fear becomes a dimension by which conflict - producing comparisons can be made. It is obviously the most powerful and widespread dimension in the Arab world and especially in the Arab east, given the history of group interaction. Without individual fear, group conflict would be less important in the contemporary world. Exploring individual fear helps clarify an otherwise puzzling phenomenon in group conflict: why is it that, despite the shared relative similarities of groups in an environment like the Arab world, individuals still identify themselves by their religion? Implicit in this is a modification of a commonly articulated proposition derived initially from Freud’s narcissism of small differences[[2]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftn2" \o ").

It is often said that the greatest conflict arises between groups that are only slightly different from each other. Comparison is then thought to be more plausible; small differences are an implied criticism of ourselves[[3]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftn3" \o "). It is only logical that individuals of one group compare themselves only with those that they believe, in relevant respects, to be «comparable».

**International Recognition of Minorities**

The U.N. Sub - Committee on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities has defined a minority as follows: « A group of citizens of a State, constituting a numerical minority and in a non-dominant position in that State, endowed with ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics which differ from those of the majority of the population, having a sense of solidarity with one another, motivated, if only implicitly, by a collective will to survive and whose aim it is to achieve equality with the majority in fact and in law»[[4]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftn4" \o ").

This definition, pronounced in 1985, does not fully encompass the issue[[5]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftn5" \o "). The question of who constitutes a minority, thus, has more to do with political and power relationships than with numerical characteristics[[6]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftn6" \o "). Ethnic groups which are subject to illegitimate discrimination in law or fact may be considered as minorities for this purpose. The international community has responded with innovations, such as the establishment of criminal tribunals for those accused of atrocities against ethnic groups. International human rights law recognizes the rights of national minorities. However, enforcement mechanisms remain largely in the province of diplomatic and political initiatives.

Although the word minority is not mentioned in the U.N. Charter[[7]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftn7" \o "), article 1(3) specifically acknowledges promotion of equal application of human rights without any distinctions, thus seeking to ensure respect for peoples of all cultures. The Charter acknowledges the importance of human rights to minorities by explicitly acknowledging protection for those who are distinct because of race, sex, language or religion[[8]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftn8" \o ").

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family[[9]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftn9" \o "). Article 7 of the Declaration states that «[a]ll are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law». Although the Declaration itself is not binding, it is incorporated into binding treaties and conventions, including the two International Covenants encompassed in the International Bill of Human Rights, and reflects the substance of practices which have in many instances evolved into customary international law[[10]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftn10" \o ").

**Brief Mapping of Minorities in the Arab World**

Studying the Arab world ethnic and religious minorities we could observe diverse groups. These groups include large tribal minorities, smaller lingual, religious and culture minorities. However even among ethnic minorities there is strong element, sometimes language, present which sets them at a distance from the larger population, such as the Kurds and the Berbers. Notwithstanding language and religion are a major factor for this diversity, such as the Armenians and the Zangians. The majority of the religious minorities in the Arab world are Christians, which include Greek Orthodox, whom the Arabs call Roman Orthodox, Nestorians and Monophicites. The Orthodox Church itself is split into several branches. These are: the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt, the Jacobi Syrian Orthodox Church and the Armenian Orthodox Church. The Coptic Christians in Egypt make up about 5-10% of the population. The Catholic Church too is split. One is the follower of Roman Catholicism and the other is the Maronite Church centralized in Lebanon[[11]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftn11" \o ").

Followers of the Protestant Church also live in the Arab world especially in Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan and Syria. Jews are a minority in the Arab world. The story of the Jews becoming a large minority in Palestine dates back to 1948. Izadis who are also known as Yazidis live in northern Iraq. This faith has a small following and their preaching is a combination of Islam, Christianity and Judaism. The Baha’is number in the Arab world (1990) was around 50,000. They are mainly concentrated in occupied Palestine and fewer in number in Lebanon. Most of the Zangian tribes in Southern Sudan are idol worshippers[[12]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftn12" \o ").

The non-Sunni faiths in the Arab world include: Shiite, Zeydieh, Ishmaelite, Druze, Alleviant, and Khavarej Abazieh. Shiite: the followers of the Shiite faith live in southern Iraq, centre and southern Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Persian Gulf coastal countries and they make up the largest non-Sunni religious minorities in the Arab world.

Zeydieh: is a branch of Shiitism and are known as followers of Zeid bin Ali bin Al-Hussein or Zein-ol-Abedin. The followers of this faith live in Yemen. Ishmaelites: is another branch of Shiitism who only follow seven Imams. The Ishmaelite faith was founded in the second Islamic century and throughout history they have been known as Sab’aeh or recognizing only Seven Imams. They live mainly in Syria, some parts of Iran and Afghanistan, central Asia, India and East Africa.

Druze: some historians see the Druze as a branch of the Ismaelites. They live in the mountains in Syria, Lebanon and occupied Palestine. They call themselves «Mouahedoun» and they presently number in the region of 400,000 (1990). The Druze are Arabs and see themselves as Muslims. Khavarej Abazieh: they are a branch of Khavarej who unlike Khavarej Azaregheh whose name has only survived in history, they have survived. Khavarej Abazieh is the religion of the majority of people in Oman, and the official religion of the country is on the basis of Abazieh.

**Minorities Particularities in the Arab World**

Nowadays the problems of ethnic, lingual and religious minorities are among the important problems of our present world. The Arab world has been faced with this problem for centuries. In the Islamic and Arab world the aforementioned problem has for at least the past sixty years taken on a particular and sometimes extreme form. Some predicted that the globalization process would somehow reduce the severity of minorities issues in the world, but the fact is that the exact opposite has happened and the information revolution and the growth of the media has escalated the problem even further.

Population in the Arab world is now over 280 million, the majority of whom spoke Arabic as their first language. 80% of the inhabitants of Arab states are Sunni Muslims. These people live in an area which extends from Iraq in the east to Mauritania in the west and from Syria in the north to Somalia in the south.

The Arab world and its present boundaries - Iraq to Morocco and from Syria to Somalia - includes tribes that do not speak Arabic as their first and mother tongue, however the majority of these people speak Arabic as their second language. A study of the tribal groups in the Arab world shows that around 40 million are mainly concentrated in four regions: first; the Kurds in northern Iraq and north-eastern Syria, second; Israelis in occupied Palestine, third; the Berbers in North Africa and fourth; the Zangians in Western Sudan.

Some of these tribal groups such as the Kurds and the Berbers are Sunnis Muslims, however some others such as the Israelis (Jews) and Zangians are a mixture of Judaism, Christianity and idol worshippers. There are smaller racial groups who live in the Arab world such as Assyrians, Chaldeans, Turkmens, Cherkess. The Assyrians and Chaldeans are Christians and Arabs. Some of the non-Arab races lived in the region before the dawn of Islam in the 7th Century. These groups have kept their ancient languages however they accepted the new religion. The most important one of these groups of people are the Kurds whose population in the Arab world is approximately 6 million.

Kurds: They are concentrated in five countries, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Iran and the former Soviet Union (Armenia and Azerbaijan). These people live in a region where several countries’ borders are included. The total population of the Kurds is around 32 million. Presently the Kurdish population in Syria is around half a million and they are mainly located in the north-western region of Syria near the Turkish and Iraqi borders. Armenians: their true mother country is Armenia in south Caucus. Their number in the Arab world is around 1.2 million. The majority of Armenians live in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Jordan and Egypt. Although Armenians have kept their culture and language but they speak Arabic as their second or third language.

Aramaeans and Chaldean: are indigenous minorities in the Arab world who speak Chaldean language. This ancient language was spoken in the Middle East before the birth of Christ. Before the emergence and conquest of Islam, Chaldean was a very common language, however nowadays it is not seen as language still in use. Aramaic is a variation of Chaldean language. This racial-religious group numbers at no more than 120,000 in the Arab world. Aramaeans and Chaldeans are Christians belonging to one of the Orthodox, Catholic or Protestant branches.

Turkmens and Cherkess: are immigrants into the Arab world. They are originally from southern Russia and the Turkish-Russian border region. Turkmens and Cherkess are Sunni Muslims and speak Arabic fluently. Their first introduction to the Arab world does not date back no further than 170 years ago. Turks are those that remained from the Ottoman Empire and live in eastern Arab lands and North Africa (Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Algeria).

Western Jews: these are the Ashkenazi Jews who have entered the Arab world (Palestine) in several waves. They were part of the political Zionist movement whose aim was to set up a Jewish state in Palestine. Therefore from 1948 Israel became the state of a different race living inside the larger Arab world. This difference was not just cultural, lingual or religious, but it is legal and political.

Nubians: the Nubians live in the southernmost regions of Egypt. They have been living by the banks of the river Nile for thousands of years. The language and religion of the majority of them is Arabic and Islam. They are darker in complexion than the rest of the Egyptians and are classed as black.

Berbers: the Berbers live in North Africa and are also known as Amharic. They are non-Arab minorities in the Arab world. They live in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Mauritania. Their numbers is over 17 million and principally they are African by origin and they speak Amharic which is a part of the Sami language. After the Arab-Islam conquests the majority of the North African Berbers converted to Islam and spoke Arabic. They are Sunnis but they have their own particular folklore, arts and literature.

**Psychological fear among Arab minorities**

Most of the minorities in the Arab world maintain fear-hate-type tendencies that are alive and well in their sociopolitical phenomena. Ethnic and minority rising and religious fundamentalism are creating a climate of violence. When it comes to fear issues in society, minorities as groups and as individuals tend to be perpetually watchful, thus, recycling manifestation of their rational and irrational fear, and the hate propaganda and violence promulgated in the name of such a fear. Not to forget is to remember, as expressed by Arab culture: The desire to forget prolongs the banishment, and the secret of salvation is called memory. The understanding of fear involves, then, an understanding of tolerance, consensus, dissent, conflict, and violence. I would like first to review these concepts somewhat further, and bring into the picture the notion of community. Fear is by no means associated to lack of sympathy. If we are unsympathetic, we are uninterested, and that defeats fear. Nor does tolerance presuppose approval. However, tolerance is tolerance (as the word conveys) in that we do have beliefs that we believe to be the right ones, and yet concede to others the right to have wrong beliefs. In this sense toleration in the Middle East is always under strain and is never complete. People have fallen into a vicious circle, and three criteria are involved[[13]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftn13" \o "). One is that people have reasons for what they consider intolerable. A second rests on the harm principle: we cannot tolerate harmful behavior. And the third criterion surely is reciprocity: in being tolerant, or in according tolerance, we expect to be tolerated in return.

The bottom line thus appears to be that the ongoing vitality of fear and anxiety rests on the tension between conviction and toleration, not on the still waters of indifference or relativism. By looking further at consensus, it has to be noted that consensus is not actual consent: it does not require that each and all give active approval to something. Thus much of what is called consensus may simply be acceptance, that is, diffuse and basically passive concurrence. Even so, consensus is a sharing that somehow binds[[14]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftn14" \o "). It is in the context of such a loosely conceived consensus that fear and anxiety finds its most agreeable soil.

Understanding consensus is equally crucial for the understanding of Arab communities and, in this connection, of the currently burning issues of minority tension, religious intolerance, and, conversely, chauvinism-acceptance. It is assumed that the perception of the social actor (individual) is necessary and fundamental in dealing with such concepts, and that the understanding of social and political reality is in the actor’s point of view. There is some logic to the argument that «totality» is more than just an autonomous level, and it is the one that dominates «lower» level of analysis, for example, that the explanation of the actions of individuals will be in terms of properties of the encompassing system. Nonetheless, it is in the actor’s own mind to decide what to do and how to understand the nature and sources of his/her action.

The controversies between these two lines of methodology were and still are the concern of social scientists that summed up the difference in terms of «structure» versus «agency»[[15]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftn15" \o "). They called this a prior adoption of a conception of social psychology’s character, and they pose the question: can social reality be reduced to individual actions, or in other terms, can the apparent properties of the social whole be explained by individual action? It may seem that social psychology is best understood as falling squarely on the agency side. However, the approach still considers that agents themselves are socially produced fictions and that their study is an essential start that one cannot do without.

**Another definition of Minorities**

A minority in the eyes of social scientists is a psychosocial group that synthesizes the general setting in which the individual develops and which determines directions in the perception of his/her self-identification. Whether integrated in the larger social setting or not, a minority maintains discrete characteristics that are labeled by its members and non-members as dissimilar to the norm. In political studies the word minority is the specific and peculiar marker of particular groups living in plural societies – groups that are diverse in culture, faith, or ritual from other group in these societies. A basic characteristic of a minority, besides being a distinctive social group, is an inbred psychological anxiety informing their conduct that in pragmatic terms makes them feel abhorred and rejected by others. Fear and anxiety touches almost every aspect of the lives of minorities. It makes politics and society more complex and contributes to alienation, aggression and revolt. Its continuation is nurtured by the persistent efforts of its members to influence laws and public policy concerning discrimination, physical punishment, the undermining of social values, and constraints on ritual and religious freedoms, marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Notwithstanding pressuring foreign policy decision making to pursue a track favoring their connection as a group with the outside world[[16]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftn16" \o ").

Again, from the social studies perspective, minorities may include political factions, social or economic classes, religious or confessional communities, sex and age groups, occupational groups, language or racial groups. The concern of this article is with only the basic social-political identity that individuals ascribe themselves in the Arab world, via, confessional, racial, and national. In this regard, one could assert that fear in the Arab world has been a valid force. It has fortified minority identity and provided the backbone of resistance to any other assimilative identity. In this sense, loyalty to one’s distinctive minority is often more real than proclaimed loyalty to the local state or the Arab nation. Aware of this, governments and especially minority-dominated states in the Arab world frequently make decisions with a view to retaining this or that group’s conditional allegiance and in the process perpetuate the minorities’ identities and become hostage to specific minority interests. This is evident in Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Sudan, gulf-states and it is institutionalized in Lebanon[[17]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftn17" \o ").

**Minorities and Nationhood**

In the presence of several communities, «nationhood» has only a secondary resonance in the Arab world. The manifestations and expressions of minority politics are in some respects different from those observed in developing nations. The outstanding difference is twofold; the first element is the pattern by which the various minority groupings construct complexes of associations and institutions in nearly every sector of society. As a consequence, most of an individual’s essential social, political and economic life is conducted within the limits of his own minority circle. The second element is the greater prominence and salience of a religious definition of communal solidarity. This could be a legacy from the Islamic and Ottoman periods when communities and peoples were defined and registered in official records according to their confessional or ethnic traits. All attempts to secularize the modern Arab states were unsuccessful; instead confessional and minority solidarity were perpetuated in the constitution, or the legal system, or political activism[[18]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftn18" \o ").

Confessional, ethnic and national diversity are especially thorny political problems in the Arab world. Ethnic diversity along religious, confessional, linguistic, or national lines has resulted in long, bloody conflicts. After independence, the development of different political trends, some of which were sectarian or ethnic, made it inevitable that minority groups remained in their established, particularistic consciousnesses. Such groups experience real threat to their identity, cultural heritage and well-being. The minorities of the Arab world have lived in fear and anxiety for hundreds of years, inculcated by four centuries of Ottoman non-Arab Sunni rule. The Ottoman Turks were hegemonic, which compelled minorities to withdraw to their inner circles of social interaction, to establish their own institutions, and covertly to devise methods to resist all attempts at assimilation. The successors to the fragmented Ottoman polity, European First, and then the Arab elites, aroused even more fear and sensitivity among minorities in the Arab World.

Minorities make no secret of the fear that permeates their social and political life, and of the profound influence that it exerts on their attitudes. The fear in whose shadow minorities live governs what they do and what they refrain from doing. It dictates their psychological reactions, which may appear incomprehensible and sometimes irrational to friends and foes.

Everywhere in the Arab world, but especially in the Arab East, where the sphere of politics is unusually broad and its impact powerful, collective security is conferred by political affirmation. For this reason, struggles over relative group power are readily transferred to the political system[[19]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftn19" \o "). In the Arab world, political affirmation confers something else that religious groups seek, minority identification with the polity. Identification can be cast in terms that are exclusive or inclusive. Some minority groups’ claim that the state and/or the region ought to be theirs and the political system should reflect this fact. Other minority groups merely claim the right to be secure and to be included in the system on equal terms.

**Individuals and Status Standing**

Arab Individuals commonly use minority-group standards to identify themselves and to analyze politics. They seek power and success within their own minority group before they can attain to it on a national level. Whereas individuals in the west are culturally constrained by the feeling of guilt[[20]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftn20" \o "), Minorities in the Arab world are constrained by the attitude of fear. The fear of being subjugated, expelled, or physically annihilated is the supreme force that lies behind the individual political attitude. A significant style of life in the Arab World is how the individual relates to his environment[[21]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftn21" \o "). In both the actual and the cognitive sense, the person in the Arab world is dominated by the vicissitudes of political nature – group-identity - and feels he/she has little control over his political environment. He lacks confidence and a sense of power in his ability to manipulate either his system or his social environment, and attitude reinforced by the historical experience of religious, sectarian, national and ethnic feuds. This sense of impotence and of danger in the environment induces him/her to rely on his/her own group and leader for decisions.

This vicious circle of fear makes individuals of the same group stick together as the only way traditionally available to protect themselves. The individual in the Arab world experiences life in community-group. A community has a common informative configuration that links people together. It reinforces in the individual’s behavior a set of stable, habitual preferences and priorities. This could affect his thoughts and feelings. As a result of learned habits, common memories, operating preferences, symbols, events in history, and personal associations, a community becomes used to certain views regarding others; they have similar ideas about good and bad and they bring up their children to behave in similar ways. Hobsbawn[[22]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftn22" \o ") defines community as a collection of living individuals in whose mind and memories the habits and channels of informative traits are carried.

Almost all individuals in all societies are afraid of something: death, sickness, injury, poverty, discrimination, and/or oppression. The social and religious beliefs and values that give individuals of all societies a sense of security from those fears have been a source of insecurity in the Arab world[[23]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftn23" \o "). With repeated religious and sectarian bloody confrontations and the development of new massive killing instruments that governments and religious groups could acquire, the Arab world individual is becoming much more tense than in the past.

Using Freud’s reasoning, one could argue that the essential differences between the traditional and the modern psyche of Arab individuals stem from the development of a powerful superego (conscience). To Arabs in the past, power lies outside the self, although to the individual, the boundaries of self and non-self are not clear[[24]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftn24" \o "). The Arab individual seeks power by following rules set by the gods, through the appealing leader, or tightly knit community structures. The problem is that, unless the individual feels he/she is worthy of god’s attention then his/her dependence for power dims. The other source of power lies in the social organization of any kind, therefore, this allows for rigid and continuous community controls. Individuals in communities adapt to their environment. They rarely attempt to master it beyond what is necessary for survival.

The modern Arab individual is slightly different. By espousing to the new technologies introduced to his/her own society, the individual tends to emphasize the disciplinary qualities of the superego, with all its positive aspects[[25]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftn25" \o "). By providing an inner mechanism of control, the superego permits the individual to develop a stronger sense of self.

**Religion and Social Science**

Drawing upon Max Weber and others, we can trace this development to cultural doctrines and, more particularly, to the more understanding of role of religions. In using the spirit of Weber, the reality of the modern Arab world demonstrates that the unintended consequences of adopting new understanding of religion, and more specifically modern Islamic doctrines, included the emergence of the modern Arab world in the form of a capitalist economic system associated with economic individualism, but, not necessarily political individualism. Weber emphasizes the economic capitalist side of the equation, but the social and political aspects are still in short of being well researched.

Though I treat group psychology as the aggregate of individual perception, however, the analysis provided here do not negate the autonomous domain in which group psychology operates. At the same time it is acknowledged that regularity cannot be explained by a single factor and that it makes sense to seek links between phenomena like collective fear and fear at the individual level. By embracing the new educational techniques and acquiring the new technologies introduced to his/her own society, the individual Arab tends to emphasize the positive qualities of the superego, but only at the economic level[[26]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftn26" \o ").

By providing an inner mechanism of financial control, the superego permits the individual to develop a stronger sense of economic individualism, but not necessarily social and political individualism[[27]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftn27" \o "). The identity and behavior of the individual with regard to social values and politics are primarily and spontaneously a function of his/her identification with a group[[28]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftn28" \o "). Theories of self-categorization were developed on the assumption of individuality as the primary psychological reality, which is prone to seeing collectivism as the phenomenon to be explained in terms of some failure to attain individualism in certain cultures, in this respect, the self categorization of Arabs are somewhat a product of social and political individualism.

Social and political individualism in the Arab world is fashioned by the process of communication. In a community-group, habits, historical experiences and preferences are the basis of the coherence of minority groups, and even the personalities of individuals. The process of communication within a group reinforces the value system and reproduces patterns of political and social behavior. The history of the Arab world exhibits the value system of sectarian groups as what is commonly known «prescriptive». A prescriptive system is characterized by the comprehensiveness and specificity of its value commitments and by its consequent lack of flexibility.

From psychological perspective, structural interaction among different groups has impact on the mind of individuals and that occurs in all societies, even the most primitive. All civilizations, old and new, have been accompanied by a heightening of superego development as a consequence to structural interaction. In some instances this lead to the emergence of a new, more universalistic religious system. It is possible, moreover, that in some parts of the Arab world, the superego development was comparable to that of the West. As Weber argues, however, cultural developments in the West were unusual from the outset. First, the emergence of a prophetic religion gave a peculiar intensity to the superego. Second, the emphasis was on an individual rather than a communal relationship with God. Third, religious-cultural imperatives stressed general, universal, moral rules. Fourth, God was conceived as standing apart from nature, and his workings could be comprehended through reason and empirical observation. Finally, great emphasis was placed upon repressing the passions in the service of worldly asceticism, i.e., fulfilling one’s obligations through activity in this world[[29]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftn29" \o ").

**Role of Leaders**

All of the known characteristics of leaders of Arab minority groups lead us to assert that they seek to denigrate other powerful leaders in the society, especially their political views. Their ability to engage in this kind of activity, regardless of its limitation by custom, the law, public attitudes and their political deference, has recently increased exponentially. Even if we are to assume that not all of the minority leaders are like this, but a sufficient number are to set the tone of interaction. The result is a powerful drive for all leaders to engage in such behaviors, whatever one’s intention, because such defense mechanisms become necessary for survival and success.

My observation of minority leaders in the Arab world is that their creative efforts, in undermining one another, result in a picture of reality that is critical of existing national institutions for reasons that are not well defined. This picture is most effective when leaders are part of the frame of the picture rather than an explicit and central ideological theme. The frame within which leaders of minority groups express themselves is the media that in turn has been one emphasizing the legitimacy of expressive individualism as against the limitations imposed by a previous Arab cultural view, and so far the impact of such presentations has been quite significant. Most of the studies of such influence have dealt with television, legitimately because it has been the media thus far with the greatest impact.

Politically oriented televisions are projecting nowadays that a large part of the Arab world is witnessing instability. Although the above projection procures to reality, for a variety of cultural reasons, Social and political instability in the Arab world has been achieved at a high cost of pain and blood. In line with Freud’s thinking, men and women have always rebelled against the price that has had to be paid in any revolution seeking change.

Paradoxically, there are limits to toleration, and even if people do not immediately rebel, they extend a genuine effort at condemnation. Once group feelings become confined to the role of their leaders, their effort in spreading condemnation becomes trusted to accepted inner circles.

Minority group behavior in the Middle East, and again in line with Freud’s thinking, is like a disorderly child, a wild beast or an untutored passionate savage[[30]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftn30" \o "). The bloodshed that minority groups in the Arab world have incurred on one another testifies probably to such descriptions.

Then again, to be fair in our analysis one has to look at the other side of the coin. Another factor that appears to have a definite positive impact on an individual joining a group is personal happiness in life derived from social relationships. In the Arab world where material happiness is lacking due to cultural and economic factors, to love and feel being loved are certainly perceived as important to one’s happiness. Also, to be a member of a large family and affiliated to a group brings about satisfaction strong enough to replace lacking in material conditions.

Furthermore, finding meaning in life is also an important factor in a person’s happiness[[31]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftn31" \o "), and it can be considered a motivational component of minorities’ solidarity in the Arab world. The individual Arab feels that he/she must be committed to something or someone in order to experience a sense of meaning. Hence a member of a minority group in the Arab world recognizes that personal goals in life would be perceived as contributing to happiness, if they are shared with others having the same cultural background.

Any study of instability in Arab societies, in my opinion, should begin by acknowledging the existence of multiple groups within the Arab world. The predisposition as such is to assert that the «group» is a central unit of the social order and individuals are important to study in the context of their group memberships.

Assuming the state as the primary site for political agency might lead us to question whether rethinking institutional representation is a useful or wise democratic project. Certainly the dangers for minority groups of working with or within the state have been much discussed by scholars with concern. In the literature on transitions to democracy in the Arab world, these concerns might also seem to offer a caution about using the language of citizenship to talk about group identities and their political significance, since citizenship seems particularly to invoke a primary relationship with the state. The understanding here is that citizenship is a powerful legitimating label for political action and political membership and that it can and should be thought of in the context of the expanded sense of the political that is a result of actions by minority groups. The last few decades of political action by groups in the Arab world can indicate the deep plurality of citizenship, as a set of practices in various places that are not reducible to one core membership, principle, or purpose.

I raise these notes not to suggest that political theorists can provide objective answers to them. What has also distinguished minority groups and other social movements in the Arab world is the recognition that the drawing of boundaries between groups, and the sorting of individuals among groups, are manifestations of social power. So underlying these questions about group membership is the question, who decides? What are the social mechanisms that the «group» maintains, and what are the political consequences of those groupings? And how identity is orchestrated?

If I may ask some very basic philosophical questions here to conclude this article, I wonder whether minority groups in the Arab world are free to chart their own destiny or are they slaves to their history, culture and psychology. Perhaps the continued study of minority groups from a political psychology perspective will reveal how cultural and psychological frameworks powerfully structure diversified minority groups and keep them from dissolving in the larger political settings.

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      E/CN.4/Sub.2/1985/31, para 181, from U.N. Sub-Committee on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities 1985 meeting, quoted in Iván Gyurcsík, New Legal Ramifications of the Question of National Minorities, in Ian M. Cuthbertson, Jane Leibowitz, Eds., Minorities: The new Europe’s Old Issue 19-50, 22 (Westview Press 1993).

[[5]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftnref5" \o ")-   Alexander A. Konovalov and Dmitri Evstafiev, «The Problem of Ethnic Minority Rights Protection in the Newly Independent States», in MINORITIES: THE NEW EUROPE’S OLD ISSUE 157-183, id. at 169.

[[6]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftnref6" \o ")-   Michael R. Gordon, «Milosevic Pledges Steps to Hold Off Attack From Nato», NY Times, June 17, 1998, at A1, Col. 6.

[[7]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftnref7" \o ")-   U.N.CHARTER, signed June 26, 1945, entered into force Oct. 24, 1945, 59 Stat. 1031, T.S. No. 993, 3 Bevans 1153 (1969).

[[8]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftnref8" \o ")-   Id. at art. 1(3).

[[9]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftnref9" \o ")-   Universal Declaration Of Human Rights, G.A.Res. 217A(III), U.N.Doc. A/810, at 71 (1948), Preamble, art. 1, art. 2, art. 7.

[[10]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftnref10" \o ")-  International Covenant On Economic, «Social And Cultural Rights», adopted Dec. 19, 1966, entered into force Jan. 3, 1976, 999 U.N.T.S. 3, art. 2(2); International Covenant On Civil And Political Rights, adopted Dec. 19, 1966, entered into force Mar. 23, 1976, 999 U.N.T.S. 171, art. 2(1).

[[11]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftnref11" \o ")-  «**Organisation For Defending Victims Of Violance**», By: Haroot Azarian 27 January 2004 in Islamic Human Rights commission, 12 November, 2012.

[[12]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftnref12" \o ")-  Information collected from the Islamic Human Rights commission, 12 November, 2012

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[[31]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world" \l "_ftnref31" \o ")-  Veenhoven, R. «Questions on happiness: Classical topics, modern answers», blind spots. In F. Strack, M. Argyle, & N. Schwarz (Eds.), «Subjective well-being: An interdisciplinary perspective», (pp. 7-26).

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**الثورات ومخاوف الأقليات في العالم العربي**

صّرح نخبة رجالات العالم العربي مؤخرًا: «إن مجرد تضامن المجموعات الدينية (الطوائف الدينية المختلفة) أمر يسبب لنا الخوف. لا يمكن أن نشعر بالأمان إلا عبر تضامن وأمن المجموعة التي ننتمي إليها. تاريخ سفك الدماء على خافية طائفية في المنطقة لا يشجعنا على الشعور بالأمان». طريقة التفكير هذه تحمل جوهر هذا المقال. إن كانت الحاجة إلى الشعور بالأمان هي طلب إنساني أساسي فهي، كما يشير إليها البيان، أمر يمكن تحقيقه عبر الانتماء إلى مجموعة تنعم بدورها بالأمان.  
في محاولة للتعامل مع الأقليات واستكشاف هويات وانتماءاته الفرد إلى مجموعات، لا يمكن الحصول على الإجابات فقط عبر فهم سيكولوجيا مقارنة المجموعات ولا يمكن فهمها من دون الأخذ بعين الاعتبار الحالات المصاحبة العاطفية والإدراكية لسمات الفرد وتفاعلاته. إن طرح تساؤلات موضوعية صرف مثل ما إذا كانت زيادة التفاعل ما بين المجموعات يسّرع أم يؤخر عملية تحديد الهوية المنفصلة للفرد يعني تفويت التأثير الحاسم لهذا التواصل. هذا يعني أيضًا التجاهل بدلًا من التطرق بعمق إلى ما يقوله الأفراد عن الآخرين وعن أنفسهم. من دون كراهية لا يمكن أن يكون هناك هوية فردية أو انتماء إلى مجموعة.  
الكراهية بين أفراد من مجموعات مختلفة قد تسبّب الخوف بقدر ما هي نتيجة للخوف. للسبب نفسه، يصبح الخوف بعدًا يمكن عبره إجراء مقارنات لها علاقة بالنزاعات. إنه بكل وضوح البعد الأقوى والأكثر انتشارًا في العالم العربي وبخاصة في الشرق العربي نظرًا إلى تاريخ تفاعل المجموعات.  
من دون خوف الأفراد لكانت النزاعات بين المجموعات أقل أهمية في العالم العصري. إستكشاف الخوف الفردي يساعد في توضيح ظاهرة محيّرة في النزاعات بين المجموعات: على الرغم من التشابهات النسبية للمجموعات في بيئة مثل بيئة العالم العربي ما أسباب مواصلة الأفراد التعريف عن أنفسهم عبر الإشارة إلى الأديان التي ينتمون إليها؟  
من ضمن هذه الأمور تعديل لاقتراح مترابط مستمد أساسًا من نظرية فرويد النرجسية المتعلقة بالاختلافات الصغيرة.  
غالبًا ما يقال إن النزاع الأكبر ينشأ بين مجموعات لا تختلف إلا قليلًا عن بعضها البعض. عندها تصبح المقارنة مقبولة أكثر؛ الاختلافات الصغيرة تُعتبر انتقادًا ضمنيًا للذات. من المنطقي أن يقارن أفراد المجموعة الواحدة أنفسهم مع من يعتقدون، في الأوجه الوثيقة الصلة، أنه يمكن مقارنتهم بهم.

- See more at: https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/upheavals-and-minority-fears-arab-world#sthash.D0DhExYZ.dpuf