

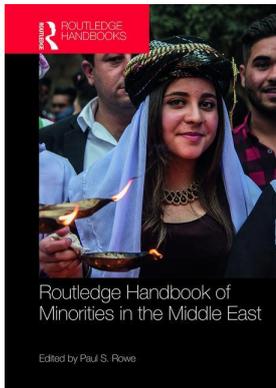
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## **Routledge Handbook of Minorities in the Middle East**

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### **Balancing identities**

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# 3

## BALANCING IDENTITIES

### Minorities and Arab nationalism

*Noah Haiduc-Dale*

During the formative stage of Arab nationalism in the early twentieth century, newly formed Arab states developed strong collective identities to replace those lost by the downfall of the Ottoman Empire. This chapter examines three very different minority groups as they negotiated their place within Arab nationalism. One is an Arab religious minority (Palestinian Christians), the second a Muslim ethnic minority (Sunni Kurds), while the third shifted from an Arab religious minority to a non-Arab religious minority during this period (Jews). The nature of a group's minority identity greatly influenced their ability to fall within or without the dominant nationalist group.

A minority's relationship with nationalism depends on two very important variables: the first is the way the majority defines its nation. Equally important is the minority group's self-definition. When these two definitions overlap, there is room for cooperation, but when they are exclusive, conflict is likely to occur. Of course, identification is neither predetermined nor historically stagnant, so a group's understanding of itself can shift. Such changes are sometimes intentional decisions, while at other times they represent a subtler adaptation to particular social and political circumstances. Scholars often focus on the efforts of the largest groupings of people to determine the nature and meaning of nationalist identification, as indeed one might expect since such movements are often controlled by political leaders from a prominent ethnic or religious group. Yet minority groups contribute to national sentiments, and are also affected by them.

During much of the twentieth century Arab nationalism drove regional political movements and served as a powerful ideological dream for many in the Middle East. Arab ethnicity and Islamic traditions vied for primacy in nationalist rhetoric. Yet not everyone in the region belonged to categories established by nationalist leaders. Minority responses varied depending on local political options, historical relationships between sub-groups, and the specific way in which a minority diverged from the majority.

This chapter illuminates just a few of the many ways that minorities in the Arab world related to various strains of nationalism. This variety stemmed from the very basic fact that minorities are all minorities in different ways. Some, such as Iraqi Kurds, are linguistic and ethnic minorities. Others, like Arab Christians in Palestine, Jordan, and Syria, are part of the ethnic majority but represent a religious minority (though some Christians in Lebanon, and a tiny minority in Israel, argue that they are not Arab at all). A third categorization includes

the Jews of various Arab countries and Coptic Christians in Egypt who are sometimes considered (by themselves and others) as part of the ethnic majority, while at other times they form a separate ethnicity, depending on specific trends at a given time. Still other excluded groups are not really minorities at all. The Shi'i Muslims of Iraq, for instance, were a subjugated *majority* during the reign of Saddam Hussein, though Shi'i are indeed a minority in the broader Arab world. Such differences led various groups to develop unique relationships with the nationalist ideologies of those in power. Of course, even within minority groups there were competing theories concerning the best approach to the rapidly changing world, though such individual sentiments are beyond the scope of this chapter.

While identities are fluid, groups do not simply invent their shared sense of belonging from scratch. Rather, the way individuals and groups conceive of their place in society is influenced by historical, political, social, cultural, and religious factors, among others. Ultimately, "identity" is a question of degree or relative importance. Which identifying feature is most important to a group at a given time, and why? The answer to that question determines who is in, and who is out, of a particular grouping. As Benjamin Thomas White has clearly articulated, the word "minority" only holds meaning when a larger group of people has conceived of itself as a majority.<sup>1</sup> Thus, a variety of alternative identities emerged in opposition to the increased importance of Arab and Islamic identification among the region's numerical majority in the years following World War I.

For centuries the Ottoman Empire managed a highly diverse ethnic, religious, and linguistic population. While it is true that non-Muslims were treated differently than Muslims in the Ottoman Empire, it was not necessarily because they were minorities. Rather, the Sultanate claimed legitimacy from religion, so percentages did not matter. In fact, for much of Ottoman history, Muslims barely comprised the majority of the overall population, if at all. Even after Greek independence in 1830, roughly a third of Ottomans remained non-Muslim, hardly an insignificant minority.<sup>2</sup> Yet the Ottomans managed such diversity by insisting on the primacy of the leadership's language (Turkish) and religion (Islam) for official matters while providing a great deal of leeway for its diverse imperial subjects. Thus, with certain limitations, most inhabitants could practice their own religions (including alternative forms of Islam), speak their own language, and manage their own cultural affairs without significant interference from the government.<sup>3</sup> However, this began to change in the nineteenth century as the Istanbul-based leadership tried to turn the Empire into a European-style nation.<sup>4</sup> Despite the Empire's best efforts, it continued to lose power vis-à-vis Europe, and the second half of the century saw government efforts shift from Ottomanism to Islamism, and finally to a nascent version of Turkish nationalism as it sought to stave off European encroachment.<sup>5</sup> Such top-down efforts influenced the way that provincial leaders identified themselves by insisting on a stronger connection to an Ottoman identity than most subjects had ever felt before. Yet such efforts also opened the door to alternative modes of belonging among those who felt alienated by governmental efforts to dictate their personal and political forms of identification.

The Empire sided with Germany in World War I, and in 1922, the Allies dissolved it, marking the end of a long era of Ottoman control over the Arabic-speaking Middle East. Under the guidance of Mustafa Kemal, the Turks fought for and won their independence in Anatolia, which became modern-day Turkey. The Arab provinces were divided among the victors of the war under the guise of the League of Nations mandates, a "period of tutelage" during which European powers were charged with preparing the Arabs for entry into the modern political system. Many observers understood the mandate system as justification of traditional colonialism, but it was a necessary justification because, particularly

following Woodrow Wilson's 14 Points speech in 1919, subjugated peoples all over the world were clamoring for self-determination.

With the Empire gone, Ottomanism was no longer a possible political identity. Arab ideologues and pragmatic politicians had to develop a feasible and unifying identity on which to base their political legitimacy, and the Arabism born in the nineteenth century developed into a full-blown nationalism in the decades that followed. Political and religious elites throughout the former Arab provinces (which were governed by the British and French through the League of Nations mandate system) worked hard to create a sense of togetherness in pursuit of a national agenda. Thus, Arab nationalist movements of the early twentieth century did not emerge from the upheavals of World War I as fully formed ideologies. Instead, it was a period of contested visions of the nation as political possibilities emerged and evaporated. There was wide variation from region to region, though it is generally accurate that many rural Arabs remained comfortable with their tribal, village, or religious identities, while elites in the largest cities hotly debated the new political reality.

Despite the many non-Muslims and non-Arabs in the region, scholars of Arab nationalism have traditionally ignored minorities' influences. An important collection titled *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East* published in 1997 does not include a single essay that deals specifically with minority groups, and references to groups such as Jews, Christians, and Kurds are scarce.<sup>6</sup> This gap is problematic because minority voices helped to shape majority nationalism by demanding that the elite reconsider widely held beliefs about the significance of language or religion in determining national belonging. A more recent focus on Islam and nationalism has helped rekindle interest in alternative approaches, as has the recent spate of histories about the late Ottoman and mandate periods.<sup>7</sup>

Among the most important debates of the post-war era was whether to pursue pan-Arab nationalism or to embrace state nationalisms with borders drawn by colonial powers. While Adeed Dawisha convincingly argues that true Arab nationalism demanded, by definition, pan-Arab unity, the political realities of the twentieth century actually led to an awkward blend of Arab and local varieties.<sup>8</sup> For some the decision was clear. Egypt had maintained relative independence from the Ottomans since Mehmed Ali's rise to power in the early 1800s and also boasted distinct natural boundaries along the Nile River. Thus, state nationalism made logical sense, at least geographically speaking. Damascenes debated the benefits of embracing the newly drawn borders of Syria versus demanding a pan-Arab state including Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine. Ultimately, the imposition of the mandates pushed most Syrians toward accepting the new boundaries. For Iraqis, the situation was entirely different since the state could claim neither distinct historical nor natural boundaries, and had been ruled on and off by the Ottomans since 1533. Moreover, the region comprised various ethnic and religious groups that did not easily merge into a simple, cohesive nation. The awkward formation of that state's identity has had lasting consequences contributing to Iraq's ongoing instability.

The debate concerning state versus pan-Arab nationalism mattered a great deal to minorities, though not always in the same way. Some permutations of Arab nationalism were particularly inclusive of non-Muslim Arabs, though others excluded one or more sub-groups from their vision of the nation. As a result (lumping together a variety of variations for the sake of simplicity), minority groups generally responded in one of two ways: when theoretically possible, they supported a nationalist umbrella broad enough to cover their specific group. Alternatively, when minority leaders worried that their group would be excluded from the majority, they actively opposed the nationalist agenda. Their opposition took a variety of forms, such as pursuit of a more inclusive state identity, or, in locations where

minority groups were densely concentrated, demanding colonial protections or even minority self-rule. Of course, the majority interpretation of national belonging also fluctuated, and minorities had to constantly adapt to such changes.

The remainder of this chapter provides brief case studies of three minority groups and their interactions with Arab nationalism. The first examines Palestinian Christians as an example of a relatively small population of non-Muslim Arabs. Such groups tended to support secular nationalism, whether pan-Arab or state-centered. As long as the primary identifier was ethnic rather than religious, Christians could comfortably support either version of nationalism despite occasional strains. Second, ethnic/linguistic minorities, as might be expected, were far less interested in Arab nationalism. Such communities were excluded by definition from the Arab nation, leaving them with little choice but to seek an alternative relationship to that majority, through either greater autonomy within an Arab country or outright independence. The Iraqi Kurds represent this approach. Third, some communities imagined and reimagined themselves in response to specific political changes of the tumultuous twentieth century. In some sense this is true for all minority groups, but Zionism and the creation of Israel fundamentally altered Jews' relationship to the Arab state.<sup>9</sup>

### **Palestinian Christians: supporters of Palestinian/Arab nationalism**

Arab Christians held leadership positions in some of the most prominent nationalist groups in the region. Individual Christians such as Michel 'Aflaq of the Ba'ath Party and George Habash of the Movement of Arab Nationalists are often cited as evidence of Christian support for Arab nationalism, as indeed they should be. Yet a handful of prominent, elite politicians do not represent the whole. The broader community was often torn about how best to fit into the ever shifting nationalist scene and responded with a more nuanced approach.

Palestinian Christians provide a fascinating case study for understanding the interplay between religious and national identification. While that community confronted many of the same issues present in Syria, Jordan, and elsewhere, the presence of the Zionist movement added an additional layer of complexity. Not only did minority groups need to work with the largely Sunni Muslim Arab population, but they also had to consider the impact their identification might have on the growing Palestinian-Zionist conflict.<sup>10</sup>

In 1917, at the start of British rule in Palestine, and continuing through the British departure from the country in 1948, Palestinian Christians represented just over 11% of the population. That number was further divided by denomination, though the Greek Orthodox composed a 43% plurality and the Latin Church (Roman Catholic) composed an additional 20%.<sup>11</sup> Thus, these two groups, as well as a minute but politically active Protestant community, are the focus here. For a variety of reasons, Christians were wealthier, more likely to live in cities, and had better connections to the British than did the majority of Muslims. They also were more likely to be fluent in English due to higher levels of education among Christians who often attended missionary schools throughout the region.

The bulk of Christians were adamantly opposed to Zionism. Many of the most vocal, politically minded Christians were advocates of whatever form of Arab or Palestinian nationalism had the most potential for success at a given moment. Khalil Sakakini, for instance, was a well-known educator who counted various British officials among his friends and even spent a year in New York.<sup>12</sup> Like many other Christians in the years immediately following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Sakakini was an ardent Arab nationalist who supported

the “Greater Syria” option which would have created an Arab kingdom in present-day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine. He even wrote the first “Arab national anthem” for that movement, titled “Saving the Homeland.”<sup>13</sup>

For many years, scholars described Arab nationalism in opposition to an Islamic identity. While some nationalists were avowedly secular, such a dichotomy is patently false. As with elsewhere in the region, Arab and Muslim identities were often conflated in Palestinian nationalist rhetoric. For instance, the preeminent Palestinian nationalist leader throughout the mandate was Hajj Amin al-Husayni, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. While he was a strong advocate for Palestinian Christian participation in the movement, it was inevitable that having a religious leader as a nationalist leader would lead to some rhetorical overlap.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, throughout the mandate, some of the most controversial issues centered on religious matters, including objections to an international missionary conference, perceived threats to the Haram al-Sharif compound where the Dome of the Rock is situated, and Muslim complaints that the British were unfairly giving government jobs to Arab Christians. As a result of such inter-Arab religious tensions, some Christians voiced their desire to seek political support elsewhere (perhaps even by cooperating with the British or Zionists), but the majority of Christian politicians adamantly advocated a strong secular national movement with plenty of room for Christian participation. Some even embraced Islam as an essential element of Arab identity and argued that Christians should expect new Arab states to have Islamic overtones, at least in a cultural sense. For instance, when confronted with Muslim complaints about the British preference for Christians in government employment, Isa al-Bandak, an Orthodox Christian from Bethlehem, suggested that “Arab Christians should be the first to recognize the rights of their Moslem Brethren over public positions and support them... [even] though some Christian officials might suffer.”<sup>15</sup>

Christians remained involved in the nationalist movement throughout the mandate, including playing an active role in the Great Revolt of 1936–1939, but the revolt and its aftermath led to a variety of changes in the 1940s. Most important for Christians was that the leadership, which had been composed of pragmatic, politically savvy Muslim leaders who believed in the necessity of Christian participation in the movement, was exiled by the British for its support of the violent political protests. Moreover, the revolt triggered broader participation in anti-British and anti-Zionist activities, with protests often led by rural rebels who were less likely to have lived side by side with urban Arab Christians. There is evidence that these rebel leaders sometimes denigrated Christianity, blurring the lines between Arab and British Christians, increasing fears of religious persecution among some Arab Christians.<sup>16</sup> While many Muslims tried to overcome the communal divide, it was difficult for Christians to fully ignore flyers posted around the country calling for a boycott of Christians who “compromise the nation for their personal benefit.”<sup>17</sup> The result was a subtle shift in Christian identification during the 1940s, with many community leaders advocating a stronger sense of communal solidarity.

One example is the Union of Arab Orthodox Clubs which emerged in the 1940s as an important organization for Christians. While officially an apolitical social club, it served as a mouthpiece for the Orthodox laity on political issues as well. (The record is unclear concerning the success of other denominations’ efforts to create similar organizations, though Latin lay leaders did seek advice from the Union of Arab Orthodox Clubs (UAOC) officials about how to establish a club as well.) Despite this avowedly communal organization with a clear goal to advocate for their religious community, members of the UAOC were still intense Arab/Palestinian nationalists. Perhaps the best example of this is their club anthem which praises the Arab Orthodox as “young men of the nation,” “lions of the nation,” and

“the army of the nation.”<sup>18</sup> Nowhere in the song does the word “Orthodox” or “Christian” appear. That is, this ostensibly Christian organization wrote a specifically non-religious nationalist song to display their dedication to the nation rather than highlight their religion. The anthem was written in 1942, during a period when some scholars claim that Christians had been fully alienated from the nationalist movement.<sup>19</sup> If the Orthodox Club is any indication, some Christians, at least, sought to use communal organizations to stake a stronger claim in the national movement.

Other regional Christian minorities faced similar decisions and came to similar conclusions. Paul Sedra argues that, like Christians in Syria and Palestine, the Coptic laity stood in opposition to the church hierarchy which wanted to maintain its role as leader of a protected minority. Non-clerical Copts had much more to gain by becoming part of mainstream Egyptian society as individuals, not an identified religious community. Still, Copts in late-nineteenth-century Egypt “never intended to forsake their Coptic communal identity. In their view, the Egyptian and Coptic dimensions of their identity were not irreconcilable. Quite to the contrary, they were mutually reinforcing.”<sup>20</sup> Similar trends could be seen elsewhere, particularly in Syria and Jordan. The goal was never to abandon religious identification, but to imagine a nation in which religion did not define an individual’s relationship to the state.

The most important conclusion to draw from this example is that while the Palestinian Christian community did debate its role in nationalism, the most prominent mode of Christian identification demanded full membership as Palestinian Arabs. Christians did not abandon religious identification, but focused on “Palestinian Arab” as the community’s most prominent public label. The goal, then, was to become part of the majority by stressing a shared Arabness with Muslim Palestinians.

### **The Kurds: sub-nationalism**

Not all minorities are religious minorities, however, so seeking inclusion in an Arab ethnicity was not feasible for all groups. The implications of state boundaries drawn by colonial powers affected everyone in the Middle East, but perhaps none more than the Kurds. Even before the British combined three Ottoman provinces into one awkward state, Kurdish leaders agitated for an independent Kurdistan which would be established in the predominantly Kurdish regions of Iran, Turkey, and Iraq. At first, the situation looked good: both France and Britain promised to support Kurdish demands for self-determination, even including an independent Kurdistan in the unfulfilled Treaty of Sèvres signed in 1920. Early drafts of the Iraqi constitution listed Kurdish as an official state language, alongside Arabic. Kemal Ataturk’s successes in Turkey both annulled the Treaty of Sèvres and severed territory claimed by the Kurds from a future Kurdish homeland. In order to facilitate the 1921 “election” of Faisal Husayni, the British sought support from all elements in Iraq, including the Kurds. Wallace Lyon, a young British officer in charge of gathering signatures in Kurdish villages, followed his orders and used all his “influence, personal and official, to persuade the people to elect Faisal,” despite their reluctance.<sup>21</sup> Kurdish reticence was well-founded. The 1925 Constitution abandoned Kurdish linguistic recognition, and King Faisal’s rule helped establish Iraq as a center of Arab nationalism. The international community also turned its back on the Kurds, with the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne (which replaced the Treaty of Sèvres) ignoring the Kurdish question.<sup>22</sup>

The failure to create an autonomous Kurdish zone triggered dramatic resistance. In the first decades of the twentieth century, Kurdish leaders developed both an increased longing for independence and a nationalist language with which to make their demands.<sup>23</sup> That is, by

recognizing and then abandoning recognition of the Kurds as a unique national and linguistic community, the drafters of the 1925 Constitution ensured radical opposition. Kurdish leaders demanded independence in the name of Kurdistan, though both observers at that time and contemporary scholars argue that regional leaders took advantage of nationalist rhetoric for “securing or preserving the legitimacy and protection of their own regional power bases.”<sup>24</sup> A scholar in the mid-1940s argued that

the chief obstacle to Kurdish national independence lies in the inability of the Kurds to unite among themselves.... They consist and have always consisted of tribal groups owing allegiance to their individual chiefs, ready to unite against a common enemy but jealous of any interference in their own affairs by chiefs of another tribe.<sup>25</sup>

At least in the opinion mentioned above, despite the rhetoric it wasn't “Kurdistan” that interested the ruling elite as much as the right to continue to manage their own affairs rather than being subjugated by a British or Arab-Iraqi government. Kurds coalesced around a national identity when they became a minority in relation to Arab nationalism and the British mandatory government threatened traditional tribal autonomy in Kurdish regions.<sup>26</sup>

The Kurds' weak minority status was apparent. They could not overcome the fact that “Iraq was... a state born under the sign of national self-determination, and both Sunni and Shi'i elites could agree that the nation was essentially an Arab and Muslim one.”<sup>27</sup> This shared sense of Arabness by 80% of the population led most Kurdish leaders to insist on independence or autonomy, and many responded with violence while the country was still under British rule. “Proto-nationalist” revolts erupted throughout Kurdish regions in the 1920s, but lack of coordination weakened their effect. An uprising led by nationalists from an emerging middle class in 1930 represented an important shift, since, for the first time, the tribal leaders were not in control.<sup>28</sup> In fact, fierce Kurdish resistance almost torpedoed Iraqi independence in 1932 because of the concern it caused among members of the Permanent Mandate Commission.<sup>29</sup>

Relatively weak Kurdish national unity should not imply that it was any less real or meaningful than other nationalism. In fact, whatever their underlying reasoning, most Kurdish leaders were adamantly opposed to both Iraqi and Arab nationalism, since the former was often presented as a fundamental segment of the latter. Indeed, Iraq was the center of Arab nationalism before passing the mantle to Egypt in the 1950s. But in the aftermath of World War I, League of Nations' policies dictated the nature of state formation, and Kurds, like other minorities, desired self-determination. As a result, Kurdish leaders developed the proper vocabulary of nation in order to maintain what they came to consider their traditional homeland.

Iraqi independence from the British in 1932 marked a shift in the Kurdish approach to nationalism. With the loss of international support, however weak, Kurdish independence no longer seemed like a viable option. Parts of “Kurdistan” had been officially incorporated into Turkey and Iran, and the Iraqi segments were under the internationally recognized control of an Arab monarch. From 1932 until the fall of the dynasty in 1958, some Kurds actively participated in nationalist circles in hopes of building a less Arab-centric Iraqi nationalism. Most Kurdish leaders, however, were more active in pursuing group rights within the Iraqi monarchy, a tendency which strengthened Kurdish identity while they waited for a more opportune moment to exert its full influence on Iraqi affairs.<sup>30</sup> That time may have arrived in the twenty-first century: Kurdish activists in northern Iraq clearly hope that the instability in the region due to the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein regime by the USA and the ongoing struggle against ISIS may lead to their long-desired independence.

### Arab Jews: from national to religious identification

Given the antagonism between Jews and Arabs in the modern Middle East, it is hard to imagine a time when some Jews, like their Christian neighbors, actively sought roles in the Arab nationalist movement. Historical circumstances make it impossible to know how Arab Jews<sup>31</sup> would have related to Arab nationalism in its heyday had the Zionist-Arab conflict not come to define Judaism in the Middle East in the first half of the twentieth century. While European Zionists pushed for a collective and politicized Jewish identity, Jews in Arab lands faced the same basic question as other minorities: how best to fit in the post-Ottoman Arab Middle East.

Zionism was a radical departure from traditional Jewish approaches to relations with their local community, and it took Arab Jews a long time to embrace the European movement which was, in essence, a Jewish nationalist movement. That is, unlike their Zionist counterparts in Europe, Jews of Arab descent did not express a desire for autonomy as had the Kurds. Such a goal would have been unreasonable since Jews were thinly spread around the region rather than grouped in one geographic location. Instead, Jews clearly understood themselves as part of local Arab communities, though how “Arab” they identified as individuals varied from time to time and place to place. In fact, based in part on their role in nationalist politics in Egypt and Iraq prior to 1948, it seems likely that (like Arab Christians) many Jews in most places would have embraced secular Arab state nationalism.

Understandably, the topic is deeply controversial, and prominent scholars of modern Jewish history disagree on how best to summarize Jewish opinion on the matter. Norman Stillman suggests that Jews had historically been set apart, and maybe even set themselves apart, more than other minorities (perhaps more like the Kurds than Arab Christians).<sup>32</sup> Thus, they were not, in his assessment, very involved in nationalist movements even in the early years. Rather, they were supportive of European control in order to reduce Muslim dominance over their communal affairs, “for obvious reasons.”<sup>33</sup> But the “obvious reasons” to which Stillman alludes are not in fact obvious at all. While he provides compelling evidence that in 1918 some Jews appealed to the British high commissioner of Iraq for all Jews to be granted Jewish citizenship, his conclusion is actually based on the assumption that Jews could never embrace, or be embraced by, Arab nationalism.<sup>34</sup> For many years, observers argued the same thing about Palestinian Christians, refusing to accept that state and Arab identities have often trumped minority ethnic or religious identification.

Stillman acknowledges high levels of Jewish involvement in Egyptian politics as an exception, but Orit Bashkin suggests that Jews elsewhere also had a political and cultural home among Arabs. She argues that Jews in Iraq often thought of themselves as fully Arab, affected by the Arab cultural enlightenment (*al-nahda*), and as an important part of the Arab national movement. That is, “Jews saw themselves as part of the Arab community in whose cultural revival they shared and whose achievements they appreciated.”<sup>35</sup> This sense of belonging to the Arab cultural and political milieu is more in line with that of Palestinian Christians and suggests that Jews, like other Arab minorities, were supportive, if sometimes wary, of secular nationalism.

What makes the story of Arab Jews so unique is that the Zionist-Palestinian conflict which took shape in the first quarter of the twentieth century erased any chance Arab Jews had to participate in Arab or state nationalist movements. Particularly after the Palestinian leadership sought to internationalize the conflict during the 1929 “Wailing Wall Riots” by highlighting Zionism’s threat to Islam, pressure mounted from all sides for Arab Jews to identify themselves as religiously and nationally Jewish to the exclusion of their Arabness.

Violent anti-Zionist protests in 1929 and the late 1930s, and the ultimate creation of the state of Israel in 1948, are often cited as turning points in the relationship between Arabs and Jews. These events slowly reshaped Arab Jews' understanding of their place in other Middle Eastern states as well. Even Stillman confirms that while "Pan-Islamic, Pan-Arab, and pro-Palestinian feelings increased throughout the Arab world" following the 1929 events, most Jews in the region reacted cautiously but rejected calls for a wholesale shift toward a Zionist agenda.<sup>36</sup> It was only after the establishment of Israel in 1948 that Jews lost any hope of incorporation into most Arab national programs. In Iraq, where Jews had been an essential part of the economic system and had participated at all levels of society, the government enacted overtly anti-Jewish laws which some have blamed on the Islamic nature of Arab nationalism.<sup>37</sup> Of course, nationalists of the day understood their anti-Jewishness (however misguided) as a protest against Zionism and in support of Palestinian Arabs. Thus, Zionist efforts to incorporate all Jews in their nationalist movement combined with Arabs' willingness to exclude Jews from their national identity ensured a new reality for Jews of Arab descent.

Thus, Arab Jews were affected by international political processes that were far beyond their control. Their anti-Zionism suggests that some were at least moderately comfortable with their minority status, though others did demand greater protections from colonial authorities. Some whole-heartedly embraced nationalism, while still others embraced Zionism. Like all minorities, Arab Jews held a variety of opinions, though all Arab Jewish communities throughout the region were heavily affected by the turmoil in Palestine.

By mid-century, the term Arab Jews had largely vanished, falling victim to the realities of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and pressure from Zionist leaders. In an effort to convince other minorities in Arab lands to follow suit, Israel has actively sought to recast the identity of other minority groups. During the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990), the Israeli government supported the right-wing Maronite/Phalange embrace of their Christian identity and encouraged them to sever ties from the Muslim Arab world, a relationship most clearly seen when the Israel Defense Force supported Christian militias as they carried out the Sabra and Shatila massacres of 1982.<sup>38</sup> Inside Israel, there has been some success in convincing the Bedouin to accept non-Arab minority status, and there are ongoing, though less successful, efforts to convince Palestinian Christians to deny their Arabness in exchange for more rights within the state.

## **Conclusion**

The specific examples cited in this chapter are by no means comprehensive and gloss over many of the important arguments set forth by individual members of specific communities. Yet, taken as a whole, they highlight minority groups' diverse responses to Arab nationalism in the early twentieth century. At a time of rapidly changing political and social circumstances, groups coalesced around particular elements of their identity and sought to formulate their group identification to either fit within the majority's mode of identification or to solidify their unique status.

Arab nationalism provided all Arabs, be they Muslim, Jewish, or Christian, with a potentially shared sense of belonging within a single cultural group. The tension between Islamic and Arab identification among Arab nationalist leaders worried some minority religious groups, but the possibility of a secular nation was strongly supported by many non-Muslim Arabs. Non-Arab minorities had a harder time finding their niche in Arab nationalist politics, though some, such as Copts and Jews, have been able to slide between "Arab" and

“non-Arab” over the years. Only minorities whose population is concentrated in a particular region (such as the Kurds) have sought outright independence during periods of political uncertainty.

One final conclusion from this brief assessment is that identification is a fluid process and is subject to disagreement among members of the same group as well as between groups. Moreover, the way the majority (or politically powerful) group identifies itself largely determines the possibilities for all others. Thus, the twenty-first-century shift toward a more Islamically focused identification in some parts of the region may in turn lead some non-Muslim minorities to stress the importance of their own religious grouping. Such religious identification is not innate, predictable, or ancient, but rather waxes and wanes in response to specific historical and social circumstances.

### Notes

- 1 Benjamin Thomas White, *The Emergence of Minorities in the Middle East: The Politics of Community in French Mandate Syria* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).
- 2 Stanford J. Shaw, “The Ottoman Census System and Population, 1831–1914,” *IJMES*, 9:3 (October 1978), 325–338.
- 3 See, for instance, Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, eds., *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of Plural Society*, 2 Vols. (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1982).
- 4 Recent works on the late Ottoman period address this issues. See, for example, Michelle Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth Century Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); and Julia Phillips Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans: Sephardi Jews and Imperial Citizenship in the Modern Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
- 5 See Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1918* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1997).
- 6 James Jankowski and Israel Gershoni, eds., *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).
- 7 In addition to those listed elsewhere in this chapter, see Jonathan Gribetz, *Defining Neighbors: Race, Religion, and the Early Zionist-Arab Encounter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Nicholas E. Roberts, *Islam under Mandate Palestine: Colonialism and the Supreme Muslim Council* (Routledge, forthcoming); and Serene Seikaly, *Men of Capital: Economy and Scarcity in Mandate Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).
- 8 Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).
- 9 One additional case which is not discussed in much detail here is the situation in Lebanon, where a number of ethno-religious groups vied for political prominence. While clearly important, Lebanon is quite unique in the Arab world, so I have opted to leave it out of this more representative discussion.
- 10 For detailed accounts of Christians under the mandate, see Noah Haiduc-Dale, *Arab Christians in British Mandate Palestine: Communalism and Nationalism, 1917–1948* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013) and Laura Robson, *Colonialism and Christianity in Mandate Palestine* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011).
- 11 Justin McCarthy, *The Population of Palestine: Population History and Statistics from the Late Ottoman Period and the Mandate* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 10.
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- 15 Central Zionist Archives S25/3004, Zionist memo to Palestine Zionist Executive, London, summarizing articles in Bandak’s newspaper *Sawt al-Sha’b*, 14 January 1928.

- 16 See Haiduc-Dale, *Arab Christians*, 138–144. Chapter 5 as a whole contends that Christians remained active in the revolt despite occasionally communal tensions.
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- 18 Israel State Archive P3061/50, Union of Orthodox Clubs–Jerusalem Anthem, 1942.
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- 23 Aziz, *Kurds*, 65 and *British and Foreign State Papers*, 1926, Part I, Vol. CXXIII, London 1931, 83–02.
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- 29 Pedersen, “Getting Out,” 980.
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- 31 The term “Arab Jews” is quite controversial in some circles, though it works well to describe those who are religiously and ethnically Jewish but who were culturally and linguistically Arab. See, Yehouda A. Shenhav, *The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion, and Ethnicity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).
- 32 Norman Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 53.
- 33 Stillman, *Jews of Arab Lands*, 55.
- 34 “The Jews of Baghdad Petition for British Citizenship at the End of World War I,” 18 November 1918, president of the Lay Jewish Council and Acting Chief Rabbi to British Civil Commissioner, in Stillman, *Jews of Arab Lands*, 256–257.
- 35 Orit Bashkin, *New Babylonians: A History of Jews in Modern Iraq* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 26.
- 36 Stillman, *Jews of Arab Lands*, 97–100.
- 37 See related documents in Stillman, *Jews of Arab Lands*, 522–529.
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