

Zoltán Somodi:

RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN ISLAMIST POLITICS

“Guide us to the straight path: the path of those You have blessed, those who incur no anger and who have not gone astray.” (Quran 1:6-7)

ABSTRACT: *Islam defines all other religions and their position in a hierarchy. The attitude of Islam towards other religions is rooted in the life of Muhammad, and the early years of Jihad, the birth of the Islamic Caliphate. These are the roots that modern day Islamists consider to be the perfect example, which should be followed to solve the problems of modern society. Islamism is on the rise today, gaining increasing popular support in the Middle East and in the Western diaspora as well. Therefore, it is worth having a look at these roots, the perfect example of dealing with religious minorities to have an idea of what is to be expected once Islamist forces become a significant political force, able to influence the political life of a nation. It is demonstrated by the examples of already existing Islamic states, governed according to Sharia law – Saudi Arabia and Iran – a country where Islamism enjoys huge popular support, and already got a chance to rule the country – Egypt – and Lebanon, where Islamist forces have not yet been able to take charge, and the proportion of religious denominations is more balanced.*

KEYWORDS: *Islamism, religious minorities, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Lebanon, Egypt*

INTRODUCTION

The motto needs explanation. Who incur anger? Who have gone astray? Who are those people that followers of the Scripture never want to be like? According to the Tafsir al-Tabari, those who incur anger are the Jews, and those who have gone astray are the Christians, although both groups can fit into both categorization¹. Islam defines all other religions, and considers them inferior and imperfect – to say the least. Some say that Islam is a religion of peace and tolerance, others say it is not worse than Christianity or Judaism, since they stem from the same root, which invented the dualistic division of the world into the creator’s world and the created world². It also has further implications, for example the division of the world into *Dar al-Harb*, and *Dar al-Islam*, the realm of evil and the realm of good in Islam.

Islamist political actors base their ideology on the necessity to return to Islam, the real solution to the problems of the world. They would like to base the state and the law on Islamic Sharia which would create a perfect and just society. This, of course, would have implications for non-Muslims living among them. To be able to judge what effect it would cause for them, it is necessary to know what the fundamentals of Islam hold for religious minorities.

¹ al-Tabarī, A. J. M. and Cooper, J. *The commentary on the Qurān. Vol. 1*, Abridged, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, 78-79.

² De Benoist, A. *On Being a Pagan*. Atlanta: Ultra, 2004, 23-25.

In this essay I will examine the doctrinal stance of Islam on religious minorities, including the Treaty of Umar. Then I will introduce how this ideology plays out in real life, when these core tenets are put in practice. For this purpose, I will examine two Islamic states and two other states where Islamism is a significant political factor, having a significant impact on Muslim-non-Muslim relations.

THE QURAN AND THE SUNNA

The sources of Islamic political stance towards religious minorities are twofold: sacred religious texts such as the Quran, and the Sunna – the words of the only God of the Universe, and the words and deeds (Hadith) and biography (Sira) of his last Prophet Muhammad – and treaties made by him and the early Caliphs – the Constitution of Medina, and the Treaty of Umar. It is therefore worth examining what the sacred texts of Islam tell us about the treatment of the religious “other” living side by side with Muslims.

This common life experience was determined by an uneven relationship, meaning that Muslims came as conquerors and non-Muslims were citizens of the defeated lands, hence a subordinated community.³ Interestingly, in the early period they were typically not a minority – but a majority compared to their Islamic overlords. This is a circumstance of importance when we look at the development of the concept of *dhimmi* in the early Islamic Caliphate.

When Muhammad started his religious career in Arabia, there were no religious minorities⁴. The pagan Arabs did not know the concept of exclusion based on religion. During those years Muhammad thought highly of the Jews of Mecca, because they kept their traditions and they possessed the Holy Scriptures, and he was more concerned about his pagan kinsmen, the Quraysh. The first conflict arose after the Hijra, when Muhammad faced a well-established and powerful Jewish community in Medina. The Quran can also be divided in two, the Meccan and the Medinan suras. The Meccan suras are more religious and metaphysical in their nature, whereas the Medina part is much more political and also more violent and exclusive. The reader notices a kind of a contradiction within the Quran, and since both parts are the words of God, both are true – depending on circumstances. This is quite hard to explain with the Western, Aristotelian concept of logic, which asserts that two contradicting statements cannot be true at the same time.

*“The Muslim believers, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabians – all those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good – will have their rewards with their Lord. No fear for them, nor will they grieve.” (Quran 2:62)*⁵

This citation can be considered as the source of religious tolerance within the Holy Scriptures. However, the Quran is not so clear about tolerance.

*“Fight those of the People of the Book who do not [truly] believe in God and the Last day, who do not forbid what God and His Messenger have forbidden, who do not obey the rule of justice, until they pay the tax promptly and agree to submit.” (Quran 9:29)*⁶

³ Besenyő, J. and Miletics, P. *Országismertető – Egyiptom*, second edition, MH ÖHP – MH KDK and MH GEOSZ, Budapest, 2014, 139, 152.

⁴ Ahmedov, A. „Origins of Law of Religious Minorities in Islam: Evolution.” *Journal of Islamic State Practices in International Law* 3:1. 2007. 23-47, 23.

⁵ Haleem, M. A. S. A. *The Qur'an: A New Translation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, 9

⁶ Haleem, M. A. S. A., *The Qur'an*, 118.

This other sura provides the Quranic foundation for the dhimmi concept, with reference to the *jizya* poll tax paid by dhimmis. The general rule here is that a later sura in the Quran abrogates the previous one, just like a later hadith does with an earlier one.

The Hadith is another important religious source of minority laws. Muhammad constructed the Constitution of Medina which is a quite egalitarian and tolerant text, regulating to co-existence of Muslims and Jews of Medina on fairly equal terms on the condition that the Jews accept Muhammad's prophethood. But this treaty was broken by non-conformist Jews, and later had no effect on the development of minority laws.⁷ The main reason for this is that it was abrogated by the final hadith of the Prophet where he said:

"Expel the al-Mushrikun (Polytheists, pagans, idolaters, and disbelievers in the Oneness of Allah, and His Messenger Muhammad) from the Arabian Peninsula, respect and give gifts to the foreign delegates as you have seen me dealing with them. I forgot the third (order)." (Sahih al-Bukhari vol. 4, 3053)⁸

The Hadith also tells us about the first dhimmis, the Jews of Khaybar, who have surrendered, and then the Prophet ordered their warriors to be massacred and the women and children taken as slaves. He himself captured a new female slave, Safiyya on this occasion.⁹ After conquering Khaybar, Muhammad planned to expel the Jews from the land, but then they asked Muhammad if they could stay in exchange for half of their income. Muhammad's answer was:

"We shall keep you on these terms as long as we wish." /Sahih al-Bukhari vol. 4, 3152/¹⁰

As this hadith shows, the peace was temporary in nature. It lasted until Caliph Umar Bin al-Khattab eradicated all religious minorities from Arabia. It is worth mentioning that Umar was one of the Pious Forefathers, as-Salaf as-Salih, a role model for modern day Islamists.

TREATY OF UMAR

After looking at religious sources, let us have a look at those treaties and pacts that have been signed by the Muslim conquerors. One of these treaties, the Treaty of Umar, is especially interesting for the purpose of this essay. As it is widely accepted, it does not date from the time of the conquest of Syria, but was a result of a later debate about the standardized status of religious minorities within the Islamic empire.¹¹ It was probably finalized by the time of Caliph al-Mutawakkil in the mid-ninth century,¹² and the process of its finalization focused mainly on how to deal with the dhimmies once the Muslim population became the majority. Are the initial peace treaties (*solh*) dating back to the time of the conquest to be respected forever, or should they be updated as the situation changes?¹³

⁷ Ahmedov, A. S., "Origins of Law of Religious Minorities in Islam", 28, 47.

⁸ Khan, M. M. *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih al-Bukhari*. Riyadh: Darussalam Publishers and Distributors, 1997, vol. 4., 180.

⁹ Khan, M. M., *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 5., 316.

¹⁰ Khan, M. M. *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 4., 239.

¹¹ Levy-Rubin, M. *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire: From Surrender to Coexistence*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011, 60.

¹² Levy-Rubin, M. *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire*, 87.

¹³ Levy-Rubin, M. *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire*, 67.

The final outcome of these debates culminated in the Shurut Umar that was Umar's treaty in its name only, but it standardized the status of non-Muslims living under Muslim rule in a much more intolerant way than any previous document. It seriously restricted the freedom of practicing the religion of the *Ahl al-Kitaab* (People of the Book), like keeping silence during religious ceremonies, ban on building and repairing churches, and imposed a series of humiliating regulations on their everyday life – dressing differently from Muslims, shaving the front of their head, forbidding them to ride horses, giving way to Muslims, giving over seats to them, the ban on marrying Muslim women but at the same time legalizing the marriage of dhimmi women with Muslim men, etc. The debate also concluded that once the Muslims become majority in the dhimmi populated areas, no previous peace treaty should be observed¹⁴ – which points back to Muhammad's last commandment.

These religious and early secular sources – which were nevertheless religiously inspired – describe the way how Islam dealt with religious minorities in the ancient past. The glorious origins of the first generation of Muslims and the time of the great Caliphate – an idealized heritage that Islamists look at as the perfect example.

SAUDI ARABIA

According to Peter Mandaville, three states are considered Islamic states: Saudi Arabia, Iran and Pakistan¹⁵ – the fourth being formed even now in Iraq and Syria. The first of them was founded in 1932 under the rule of Abd al-Aziz Ibn Saud. The country's constitution is the Quran, and the royal dynasty's symbiotic and mutually dependent relationship with the Wahhabi clergy ensures the harsh rule of fundamentalist Islam – with all its implications to religious minorities. It is no surprise that Christians are being denied of even private places of worship (as Muhammad's hadith ordered), but Saudi Wahhabism takes intolerance to the extreme, and turns it against other Muslims as well.¹⁶

All Saudi legislation is strictly textual and follows the Hanbali school of jurisprudence. Two important aspects of Wahhabism is the rejection of *taqlid* meaning that all principles must come from the religious texts and not through the mediation of humans. Anyone who did not adhere strictly to the words of the Quran and the Sunna is an infidel.¹⁷ The second aspect is *takfir*, or declaring a Muslim an infidel. These are the key aspects of today's Saudi religious politics.

Saudi Arabia has not signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), instead it proposed a Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights (UIDHR), which closely resembles the statements of the UDHR but supplements it with references to the Sharia – without defining it. This causes ambiguity as far as how the Sharia will restrict basic human rights. The Arabic version of Article 12 states that every person has the right to express his thought and beliefs within the limits of the Sharia law.¹⁸ As discussed above, these limits can be very narrow. In fact, this declaration only reasserts the supremacy of the Sharia law over human rights law, which are incompatible with each other in the opinion of the signatories.

¹⁴ Levy-Rubin, M. *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire*, 58-87.

¹⁵ Mandaville, P. *Global Political Islam*. London: Routledge, 2007, 149.

¹⁶ Ruzinski, N. „The Treatment of Religious Minorities in Saudi Arabia: A Violation of Islamic Principles and International Law.” *International Journal of Civil Society Law* 9:3 (2011): 37-53, 37.

¹⁷ Ruzinski, N. „The Treatment of Religious Minorities in Saudi Arabia”, 38.

¹⁸ Ruzinski, N. „The Treatment of Religious Minorities in Saudi Arabia”, 43.

Another international document, very similar in its outlook, is the Cairo Declaration. This document again puts the phrase “in accordance with the Sharia law” at the end of the critical sentences referring to universal human rights – which technically makes them null and void. At the same time, it also asserts that “Islam is the religion of unspoiled nature. It is prohibited to exercise any form of compulsion on man or to exploit his poverty or ignorance in order to convert him to another religion or to atheism.” The Basic Law of Saudi Arabia only reinforces this tendency.¹⁹ It seems that followers of other religions cannot really expect much protection from this declaration, and Muslims should think twice before converting, or they will face death penalty.

With these prefixes it is no surprise that non-Muslims face continuous harassment in Saudi Arabia. Places of worship for other religions cannot exist in Saudi Arabia – because Muhammad said so.²⁰ Hence the approx. 3% of the population (mainly migrant workers) can only worship in private, but that is also strictly regulated and constantly checked. Saudi authorities arrest Christians and close down even private services if they are “too loud” (as dictated by the Treaty of Umar), or are held “too often in the same place”. Schoolbooks vilify other religions, and non-Muslims are being pressurized to convert.²¹

Shias are also a target for Saudi ulama who constantly denigrate them. Abd al-Wahhab himself was shocked at the “heretic” practices of Shias in Basra and Karbala.²² Today their situation is made worse by current politics and rivalry with Iran, as indicated by the recent execution of the Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr and the uproar caused by it. The ulama issue fatwas against them condemning their practice of *taqiyya* (misleading) and questioning their loyalty. This was especially exacerbated during the Bahrain protests in 2011.²³ Their growing numbers – due to high levels of population growth and polygamy – are considered a threat.

Shias are not considered real Muslims, they are heretics, sorcerers, idolaters, but more simply put – *kafirs*. They are harassed, blocked from places of worship, denied fair trial in courts, and face discrimination in employment and education – the ulama is furious about the spread of Shia schools and Shia students “deliberately infiltrating” the higher education and the labor market, especially the government sector. A third field of “infiltration” is economy, where the employment of Shias is part of a conspiracy.²⁴ Nobody talks about equal opportunities with regards to access to higher education or employment.

Authorities are constantly attempting to close down Shia religious centers and arresting Shia religious leaders. In 2009 Shia pilgrims clashed with religious police in Baqi cemetery while visiting the tombs of four imams.²⁵ Of course, the Shias were blamed and after the incident Crown Prince Nayif – then interior minister – accused the Shias for not respecting the majority religion of Sunnis.²⁶ According to the “moderate” cleric Salman al-Awda there is no chance of reconciliation between the two branches of Islam. The only difference

¹⁹ Ruzinski, N. „The Treatment of Religious Minorities in Saudi Arabia”, 45.

²⁰ Guillaume, A. *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah*. London: Oxford University Press, 1955, 525.

²¹ Ruzinski, N. „The Treatment of Religious Minorities in Saudi Arabia”, 48.

²² Ismail, R. „The Saudi Ulema and the Shi'a of Saudi Arabia” *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies* 5:4 (2012): 403-422, 403.

²³ Ismail, R. „The Saudi Ulema and the Shi'a of Saudi Arabia”, 409.

²⁴ Ismail, R. „The Saudi Ulema and the Shi'a of Saudi Arabia”, 414-415.

²⁵ Ruzinski, N. „The Treatment of Religious Minorities in Saudi Arabia”, 49.

²⁶ Ismail, R. „The Saudi Ulema and the Shi'a of Saudi Arabia”, 408.

between establishment and non-establishment clerics is that the latter are even more radical towards Shias.²⁷

The exclusive nature of Saudi Wahhabism creates a situation where being a non-Muslim is virtually impossible, while being a Shia Muslim means constant harassment and denigration by the state and the majority.

IRAN

To some extent, Iran plays a similar religious leadership role for Shias as Saudi Arabia means to Sunnis. In this country, Shiism is not an oppressed minority (or oppressed majority) as in the rest of the Islamic world but it has been the predominant sect since the time of the Safavid dynasty, and the official state religion since 1979, so much so that some hardline clerics petitioned Khomeini to declare Shiism as the “true Islam”.²⁸ There are other similarities between Saudi Arabia and Iran if we have a look at the treatment of religious minorities in their societies.

The theoretical foundation of treatment of religious minorities in Iran is Sultanhussein Tabandeh’s *A Muslim Commentary on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, put in practice almost verbatim after the revolution.²⁹ To briefly summarize its content it refers to the UDHR similarly as the UIDHR did, “adapting” its content to Islamic standards and claims that the human rights that people are trying to develop have already been in place since Muhammad. However, it uses a strict double standard in dealing with Muslims and non-Muslims. Criminal law punishes serious crimes (murder, adultery) differently according to the religion of the perpetrator and the victim – If a Muslim kills a Muslim, he will be killed by the next-of-kin. But if the victim is a non-Muslim, only a penalty fee and lashing applies. Similarly, a non-Muslim man who commits adultery with a Muslim woman will be executed, a Muslim only receives lashes and one year in prison. Idolaters are “lower than wild beasts”, and marriage between a non-Muslim man and a Muslim woman is strictly prohibited – never can a non-Muslim “rule” a Muslim. The government must be all Muslim, and apostasy is to be punished by death.³⁰ This is how human rights are interpreted to be compatible with Islamic law according to Iranian Shia Islamist ideologues.

In the secularism of the Pahlavi era religious minorities enjoyed a relatively tolerant period. After the Islamic Revolution, however, with the increasing importance of religious discourse in politics, their status and perspectives deteriorated significantly, and face intimidation, discrimination and isolation. This tendency can best be described by Khomeini’s statement: “Every aspect of a non-Muslim is unclean”.³¹ Even though non-Muslims make up only less than 2% of Iran’s large population, they are still held as scapegoats for many of society’s problems and targeted by authorities. The Iranian constitution recognizes only three religious minorities: Jews, Zoroastrians and Christian Iranians – the former dhimmi groups.³² It must be pointed out that the status of Zoroastrians as People of the Book was

²⁷ Ismail, R. „The Saudi Ulema and the Shi’a of Saudi Arabia”, 418-419.

²⁸ Sanasarian, E. *Religious Minorities in Iran*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 17.

²⁹ Sanasarian, E., *Religious Minorities in Iran*, 25.

³⁰ Sanasarian, E. *Religious Minorities in Iran*, 25-26.

³¹ Choksy, J. K. „Non-Muslim Religious Minorities in Contemporary Iran” *Iran and the Caucasus 16* (2012): 271-299, 271.

³² Choksy, J. K. „Non-Muslim Religious Minorities in Contemporary Iran”, 274.

debated in Islamic jurisprudence, and they were only adopted as dhimmis for practical reasons, but the Quran refers to them as pagans.³³

The religious minorities are represented in the Majlis by one parliamentarian for Jews, one for Zoroastrians, and three for Christians (two for Armenians and one for Assyrian-Chaldeans), but they are excluded from those positions that hold real political power in Iran, like high government offices and the theocratic branch of state power (Assembly of Experts, Council of Guardians), and cannot become Supreme Leader. Mandeans are not recognized as a religion, Catholics and Protestants are not considered indigenous Iranian communities hence not protected under the Constitution, and Bahais are considered apostate ex-Muslims, who should be reconverted or persecuted. They are often victims of murders, an act justified by Islamic law against apostasy.³⁴ The current Iranian system of recognizing a religious minority as such points back to the 7th century rulings of the founder of Islam – the dhimmi concept. But having the secondary and oppressed position of a dhimmi is still more favorable than not having it.³⁵

Like in Saudi Arabia, religious minorities' loyalty is questioned – because of their better status in the Pahlavi era, described by Khomeini as “an anti-Islamic regime that wishes to revive Zoroastrianism”³⁶, and connections with Western secularism and liberalism. Authorities harass these communities by confiscating their religious sites, placing Shia clerical and religious pictures in their schools and sacred shrines, or even vandalizing churches during “inspections” to ensure there are no Muslim converts present. On these occasions authorities enforce Islamic regulations within temples of other faiths. The most targeted community in this regard remains the Bahai – they often disguise themselves as Zoroastrians to avoid persecution.³⁷

Education is crucial for the survival of these communities and it is also a field of contestation and influence for state authorities. Recognized minority schools face nationalization attempts and harassment from religious authorities to teach proper Islamic theology as superior to any minority belief, while Bahais do not even dare operate schools because teachers would fear death penalty for being apostates. University students must pass an entrance examination in Islamic theology regardless of their minority status.³⁸ Communal rites and religious ceremonies where minorities – according to their own customs – do not follow Islamic rules of gender segregation have become private events, and are often raided by state authorities and participants are detained for not adhering to Islamic standards. These official reactions can get even more violent when Muslim converts are present at these events – the punishment for apostasy is death.³⁹ Economic opportunities are also limited for religious minorities. They are discriminated against in the public sector, and entrepreneurs must label their stores properly as “unclean” to let Shias know they are purchasing items from an inferior person.⁴⁰

³³ Sanasarian, E. *Religious Minorities in Iran*, 21.

³⁴ Choksy, J. K. „Non-Muslim Religious Minorities in Contemporary Iran”, 288.

³⁵ Choksy, J. K. „Non-Muslim Religious Minorities in Contemporary Iran”, 275.

³⁶ Choksy, J. K. „Non-Muslim Religious Minorities in Contemporary Iran”, 287.

³⁷ Choksy, J. K. „Non-Muslim Religious Minorities in Contemporary Iran”, 279-284.

³⁸ Choksy, J. K. „Non-Muslim Religious Minorities in Contemporary Iran”, 276-277.

³⁹ Choksy, J. K. „Non-Muslim Religious Minorities in Contemporary Iran”, 279.

⁴⁰ Choksy, J. K. „Non-Muslim Religious Minorities in Contemporary Iran”, 286.

To summarize the situation of the above mentioned religious minorities it seems to be clear that the Islamic Revolution brought a significant setback in the life of all of these communities, but it is the Bahais who suffered the worst persecution and exclusion as the true infidels or apostates and are accused of conspiracy with Zionists and the US. After Khomeini came to power many lost their jobs, were detained or executed, numbering in the hundreds.⁴¹ Their persecution was systematic, violent and destructive, supported and conducted by the government. They deserved this treatment because their faith was rooted in Islam – meaning they are apostates. For this same reason are non-indigenous Christian and Zoroastrian communities targeted – many of them are Persian ex-Muslim converts.⁴²

EGYPT

The increasing role of religion in domestic politics can be traced back to the end of Nasser's regime in Egypt. As opposed to the quick and radical change of the Islamic Revolution the process of Islamization in Egypt was slow but its effect on religious minorities was similar to the Iranian case. The largest non-Muslim religious group are the indigenous Egyptian Coptic Christians, comprising about 6-12% of the population.⁴³ Although a politically diverse community they are united in their fear of Islamic law and political Islam⁴⁴ and concerned about the increasing religiosity in politics happening since Sadat's rule in the 1970s.

Sectarian tensions started to worsen in Minya, Sohag, and Asyut provinces in the 1970s, where the Copts' percentage is the highest in the country, and the Gama'a al-Islamiyya militant Islamist organization was also strongest. Mostly acts of beating and vandalism happened against the "Crusaders" as the Copts were labelled by Gama'a preachers. Copts, just like Iranian religious minorities were accused of collaboration with the West and sycophants of liberal capitalism. The state failed to punish the perpetrators. Sectarian tension continued in the Mubarak era, one of the worst clashes happened in 2005 because of a theater play considered to be blasphemous and propagating apostasy. As an outcome three Christian churches were attacked and 63 people were injured.⁴⁵

Article 1 of the Egyptian Constitution declares that the state and its democratic system is based on citizenship, but it is already contradicted by Article 2 stating that the main source of legislation are the principles of the Sharia law.⁴⁶ Recognized religious minorities (again People of the Book only, and not the Bahais) are allowed to apply their own personal status law in cases between persons of the same sect. Two Christians from two different sects will be judged by Islamic law. The concept of "public order" overrides religious freedom, as in the case of Bahais, who are considered to be an offense to Islam. Personal status law only governs family issues, but inheritance is governed by Islamic law – Bahais cannot inherit, and underage children of converts become Muslims automatically, regardless if the parents convert to or from Islam.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Sanasarian, E. *Religious Minorities in Iran*, 116.

⁴² Sanasarian, E. *Religious Minorities in Iran*, 124.

⁴³ Besenyő, J. and Miletics, P. *Országismertető – Egyiptom*, second edition, MH ÖHP – MH KDK and MH GEOSZ, Budapest, 2014, 139.

⁴⁴ Scott, R. M. *The Challenge of Political Islam: Non-Muslims and the Egyptian State*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010, 66.

⁴⁵ Scott, R. M. *The Challenge of Political Islam*, 75.

⁴⁶ Scott, R. M. *The Challenge of Political Islam*, 86.

⁴⁷ Scott, R. M. *The Challenge of Political Islam*, 86-89.

Even before the Islamization, Egypt was not entirely secular, and personal status and family law was determined by religious identity. The Islamization further strengthened the division within Egyptian society along religious fault lines.⁴⁸ These tensions increased as a result of the protests of the Arab Spring in 2011, leading to burning and demolishing churches, and the Maspero massacre on October 9th 2011, where 25 people were killed when security forces quelled a Coptic protest demanding punishment for perpetrators of a church destruction in Upper Egypt.⁴⁹

For Copts, the relation of state and religion is crucial. Whenever religion becomes a determining factor, minorities fear marginalization and threat, as it has been apparent since Sadat's rule. Copts saw the intent of an-Nour to impose a stricter Sharia as a threat and a tendency of turning Egypt into an Islamic state. It was also underlined by the increasing tendency of blasphemy convictions, especially after the release of the movie "Innocence of Muslims".⁵⁰

After 2011, when the Mubarak government was toppled, the number of sectarian attacks rose by 150% in two years, and even the papal seat in Cairo was attacked, which had been unprecedented before.⁵¹ Copts were mourning the death of victims of sectarian violence when angry Muslims chanting Muslim Brotherhood slogans attacked the mourners. The incident resulted in police intervention and hundreds of people were injured and two killed. Salafis and militant Islamists demanded that the construction and repairing of churches be banned – just like in the Treaty of Umar. Even occasions of *jizya* collections were reported. Although these were committed by criminal gangs, they still had bad connotations.⁵²

The Muslim Brotherhood accused the Mubarak government of inciting sectarianism, and indeed the former regime was guilty in not dealing with this problem but rather ignoring it. However, Copts under the Mursi regime were also targeted as a revenge for voting against Mursi.⁵³ The increased sectarian violence was not a deliberate government policy but the inability to provide security and to punish the offenders, added to the boldness of religiously motivated violence and harassment.⁵⁴ Yet, the government's actions did not help to get rid of these suspicions: Mursi did not visit the Pope after the attack on the cathedral, but he visited diarrhea victims of Al-Azhar. State officials blamed the Copts for the cathedral attack, claiming that they went to the ceremony armed to the teeth.⁵⁵

Even if the persecution of Christians was not an overt government policy under the Mursi regime, the general atmosphere, the lack of security and legal action against perpetrators of religious violence made the situation of religious minorities significantly worse than before.

⁴⁸ Scott, R. M. *The Challenge of Political Islam*, 90.

⁴⁹ Van de Bildt, J. „Egypt's Copts under Islamist Rule." *Tel Aviv Notes* 6:21 (2012): 1-6, 1.

⁵⁰ Van de Bildt, J. „Egypt's Copts under Islamist Rule", 3.

⁵¹ Besenyő, J. and Gömöri, R. „Arab tavasz, keresztény ősz? A keresztény kisebbségek helyzete a Közel-Keleten az „Arab Tavasz" után", *Szakmai Szemle*, 2013/1., 15-16.

⁵² Tadros, M. „Copts under Mursi: Defiance in the Face of Denial." *Middle East Research and Information Project*. 2013. <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer267/copts-under-mursi>, Accessed on 22. March 2015.

⁵³ Tadros, M. „Copts under Mursi: Defiance in the Face of Denial."

⁵⁴ Van de Bildt, J. „Egypt's Copts under Islamist Rule", 2.

⁵⁵ Tadros, M. „Copts under Mursi: Defiance in the Face of Denial."

LEBANON

The three countries addressed above have an overwhelming Muslim majority, whereas Lebanon is more balanced in demographic terms. Christians are somewhere around 40% of the population, but this is only an estimate because no census has been held since 1932. There is another difference: the Maronite community in Lebanon has avoided dhimmitude and lived as free Christians throughout its history.⁵⁶ These two factors create a unique political heritage that has implications for today's sectarian politics in Lebanon.

Since the state's foundation, sectarianism has always defined domestic politics. As in Egypt, the constitution has contradicting parts, where one paragraph identifies the suppression of confessionalism as a national goal and provides everyone equal opportunities, while another one divides the mandates of Parliament according to religion. Electoral law is also determined by religious affiliation. Regarding personal status law, each religious community has their own courts, and when the litigants belong to two different sects, then a secular court has jurisdiction⁵⁷ – as opposed to Egypt, where in such cases an Islamic court will decide. Changing religion is also possible in Lebanon, and the religion of minors will follow their father's religion, as opposed to Egypt, where minors will be Muslims regardless whether the father converts to or from Islam. Criminal law also applies to every citizen, regardless of religion. These conditions are somewhat more favorable to religious minorities than in the three countries examined before. This is the historical heritage of the Lebanese sectarian, consociationalistic state structure, dating back to the days of Maronite hegemony.

The sectarian nature of Lebanon's political and legal system was created to protect the interests of a minority, the Christians. The only democracy in the Middle East had an unfair foundation, the institutionalized prioritization of Maronites that was only corrected after the Taif Agreement. The consecutive Maronite presidents did nothing to integrate the Muslims into the political decision making, instead they tried to further strengthen their power. Then, over the course of the 15 years of civil war, they made several miscalculations (inviting Syria to the conflict, then allying themselves with Israel), which ultimately led to internal divisions and finally the marginalization of the Maronite community in Lebanese politics. Today Maronite domination has faded in the distant past, and a divided Christian community with declining population is on the way to become dependent on the good will of Muslims while Islamism is on the rise.⁵⁸

But the Muslim majority does not form a united block, and regional realpolitik also causes unlikely alliances between Islamists and Christians. With the rise of Sunni Islamism in the region, Shia Islamist Hezbollah and Lebanese Christians find themselves on the same platform, allying with each other against a common, dreadful enemy – the takfiri terrorism incorporated by ISIS. Two thirds of Lebanese Christians support Hezbollah's anti-ISIS campaign in Syria according to a 2014 survey,⁵⁹ and Hezbollah is portraying itself to be the

⁵⁶ Malik, H. C. „Political Islam and the Roots of Violence.” Abrams, Elliott. *Influence of Faith: Religious Groups and U.S. Foreign Policy*. Boston: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001. 113-148, 129.

⁵⁷ Harrington, A. M. „Resurrection from Babel: The Cultural, Political, and Legal Status of Christian Communities in Lebanon and Syria and Their Prospects for the Future.” *Tulsa Journal of Comparative and International Law* 13:2 (2006): 217-248, 233.

⁵⁸ Zamir, M. „From Hegemony to Marginalism: The Maronites of Lebanon.” *Minorities and the State in the Arab World*. 1999. <http://www.ciaonet.org/book/bengio/bengio06.html>. Accessed on 22. March 2015.

⁵⁹ BCRI. *Beirut Center for Research and Information*. 2014. 10. <http://beirutcenter.net/Default.asp?ContentID=859&menuID=46>, Accessed on 22. March 2015.

protector of Christian – and all-Lebanese – interests against the growing takfiri militancy. So the relationship between Lebanon’s Islamists and Christians must be interpreted in the context of the growing Islamist force that casts its shadow on both of them, effectively making them allies against this common enemy. Some Christians, however, do not feel that the solution is an alliance with Hezbollah. Instead they argue that Hezbollah is just as dangerous because it does not allow meaningful democratic progress to happen in the country and opposes the strengthening of the central government⁶⁰ – which would decrease their role in domestic politics.

It seems that the well-known pragmatism of Hezbollah is working in this respect. However, if we take into consideration the long-term historical examples and the status of non-Muslims in the ideological “big brother” Iran, it is not impossible that this honeymoon – where the picture of Hassan Nasrallah can end up on Lebanese Christmas trees⁶¹ – will continue with the long-term dullness of everyday coexistence and finally end up with a domestic violence lawsuit. Such a situation can arise, for example, when the long term tendency of political and demographic marginalization of Christians continues, and Lebanese Christians will have to face the same fate as almost every other Christian community in the Middle East – dhimmitude. Nevertheless, today’s Hezbollah-Christian relationship is a unique exception in the long line of conflicts between Islamists and religious minorities. The future of Lebanon depends exactly on the ability of its religious communities to reconcile with each other. Looking at the foundations of Islam as a perfect example how to do this – might not be the best option.

CONCLUSION

The four cases examined in this essay show the tendency that whenever fundamental Islam becomes a determining factor in domestic politics, religious minorities will face exclusion and discrimination. Its degree can vary, but its presence is very hard to ignore. The examples of Saudi Arabia and Iran demonstrate that religious minorities cannot count on tolerance in the spirit of human rights law in a state defined by the textual interpretation of Islam, regardless how much Islam is claimed to be the religion of peace and tolerance.

Egypt shows that even where Islamists are de facto not in power, the relationship between the state and religious minorities are closely connected with the relationship between Political Islam and the state,⁶² and when they come to power, violence and discrimination against religious minorities increases.

Lebanon is a special case where the Islamist movement does not consist of a majority and it seeks the support of a still significant Christian community against an even more extreme and intolerant Islamist movement. Until Islam was a minority religion and coexistence did not generate serious concerns and frictions in the dhimmi populated cities, tolerance prevailed in the times of the early conquest as well. But as circumstances changed – especially demography – minority laws started to become more exclusive and intolerant. Those Christian communities that were powerful enough to avoid the second-class citizenship of dhimmitude were very rare. With the exception of Cyprus and Mount Lebanon they had to adapt to a

⁶⁰ Abdallah, M. *Now*. 2015. 03 05. <https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/reportsfeatures/564914-do-christians-need-hezbollah>, Accessed on 22. March 2015.

⁶¹ Kais, R. *Ynet News*. 2013. 12 30. <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4471302,00.html>, Accessed on 22. March 2015.

⁶² Scott, R. M. *The Challenge of Political Islam*, 65.

majority that despised and excluded them – and this tendency has not changed significantly over the centuries. What is the importance of all this today in Europe? Demography is an extremely important question, especially when the popularity of Islamism is on the rise among the rapidly growing, disillusioned Muslim population. With the number of Muslims growing, dhimmitude will be a less and less tolerable condition for the *kafirs*.⁶³

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⁶³ Kiss, Á. P. „Islamic Fundamentalism and Political Violence in Europe.” *Academia*. 2010. https://www.academia.edu/645776/ISLAMIC_FUNDAMENTALISM_AND_POLITICAL_VIOLENCE_IN_EUROPE. Accessed on 22. March 2015.

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