

Remnant Nations

By Bat Ye'or

A review of “Minorities in the Middle East - *A History of Struggle and Self-Expression*”, by Mordechai Nisan, McFarland & Company, Inc. Jefferson, North Carolina, and London, 2002, second edition.

http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0786413751/qid=1045019774/sr=1-1/ref=sr_1_1/002-4073284-4605654?v=glance&s=books

For the superficial observer unfamiliar with the history of the region, the Middle East seems to be a homogeneous, gigantic Arab-Muslim continent. However, under this heavy blanket of dictatorial uniformity, the remnants of colonized, extinguished nations – crushed and dispossessed by Arab Muslim imperialism – survive with pain and anguish. Withstanding genocides, or persecutions, and continuous sociopolitical repression, their hearts still beat, inspired by the resolve of freedom and survival.

It is their history that Mordechai Nisan tells us, combining clear and extraordinary scholarship with a perspicacious sensibility. Who are these peoples? In his subtle analysis, Nisan demonstrates that they represent diverse ethnic groups, with unique historical experiences. The author constructs a fascinating mosaic of peoples, beliefs, and intertwined histories, providing us with many discoveries. This enlarged work expands upon a 1991 study, with much new material, focusing on the various factors that keep oppressed nations alive.

Nisan starts by specifying the characteristics these people share in their diversity. What makes a people ethnically unique? What inner forces of cohesion shaped their resistance to the Arab and Islamic onslaught on their lands and civilisations from East Persia to North Africa? Those factors promoting survival are neither fixed nor stable. Throughout the political dynamism of historical events, they have modelled and maintained the collective self-consciousness that has been preserved within a people over millennia. “The crux of a minority struggle”, writes Nisan, “often revolved around the ability to define identity from within as a matter of group self-articulation, and not be the victims of a superimposed identity from without.” (p.79) Crushed by cultural and religious Arab-Islamic imperialism, the group identity and cohesion is a testimony to its indigenous uniqueness. But can this human and cultural diversity of the Middle East survive after millennia of hardship, unforeseen challenges, and resistance?

Thus, one discovers beneath the heavy and intolerant hegemony of Arabism, stifling the Middle East, a substructure of living, resistant minority peoples cultivating their pre-Arab and pre-Islamic native languages, cultures, and religions. Nisan classifies ethnic groups in four main categories: (1) the Islamized peoples who resisted Arab colonialism and kept their own culture and languages, like the Kurds (Iraq, Iran, Turkey), the Berbers (Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco), the Baluch (Pakistan); (2) the heterodox Muslim minorities who were Arabized but resisted Islamization by keeping their ancestral beliefs and customs under a Muslim veneer, like the

Druzes (Levant) and the Alawites (Syria); (3) the Christian minorities: Armenians, Assyrians, Copts, Maronites, Sudanese; (4) the Jews - the only minority who succeeded in liberating a part of their historical land from Arab Islamic imperialism.

Nisan describes the rich history of each group, the tensions to resist cultural and linguistic foreign Arab colonization, or religious pressure for Islamization; the difficulties entailed in maintaining the history and culture of the group; the process of survival adopted by each group; the modalities of adaptation, and the compromises employed to save a modicum of freedom without disappearing. This analytical survey carries us through several levels of understanding, from the policy of conquest and domination that included spoliations, slavery, deportations and genocide for the rebellious conquered peoples, to the various mechanisms of survival adopted by each crushed, humiliated, oppressed and tolerated community. Not every group developed the same self-consciousness of its history, its culture, or its ethnic characteristics, but all resisted.

The political and social tensions highlighted by Nisan are most urgent and topical for our Western societies. In our age of multiculturalism and multiethnicism, which has seen the recent development in the West of large immigrant communities, what does integration mean? Can some groups integrate more easily than others? Can integration succeed when fundamental values clash? Though studying the Middle East situation in a sober and scholarly manner, Nisan's analysis of the links and structures of group identity, of the conflict between territorial ethnicism and religious imperialism, is also very relevant for the West.

In history, chance is a fugitive fairy that doesn't pass twice. The light of freedom sparkled for the oppressed Christian minorities in the Middle East after World War I. It was quickly extinguished by France and Britain, eager to appease Muslim hostility in their Arab colonial dominions, created artificially to suit their imperial designs. In this cynical combination of colonial interests and Muslim appeasement policy, the legitimate aspirations of the Armenians, Kurds, Assyrians, and Copts, were sacrificed. Their ancestral homelands were arbitrarily carved out into enormous Arab-Islamic entities while concessions to Islamic demands violated their rights. Some, like the Armenians, Assyrians and Jacobites were simply abandoned to bloody reprisals, while the promises they had been given were denied. Only the Maronites and the Jews were given a chance. But, for these latter it was a delusion and a snare. British pro-Arab policy from the 1930s in mandated Palestine, the gestation of the Shoah in Europe, the closure of all escape for the Jews at the Evian Conference in 1938 seemed to deal the last blow to the Zionist dream of liberation. The Maronites had to wait a generation to experience the bitterness of world abandonment and the betrayal of their friends. Hence, among all the *dhimmi* peoples, only Israel survived the lethal Euro-Arab alliance against the indigenous Middle Eastern peoples. And Israel today remains defiant to the Arab-Palestinian terrorist *jihad* to eliminate her, Eurabia's war supported diplomatically by France.

After all, it was France in the 1830s which conceived an immense Franco-Arab Empire stretching from Algiers to Antioch – to be snatched from the Turks – which Paris intended to control with the Vatican, thereby ensuring a Christian-Muslim alliance against the Jews and Protestants. This policy never died out: from the strident antisemitism of the 19th century, to the Vichy government's collaboration in the deportation of the Jews, through the Franco-PLO collusion of today. It was French politics that prevented and foiled any attempt of Christian-

Israeli collaboration in the Middle East, so as to maintain Israel's isolation and indictment as a source of evil. But the Arabization promoted by France and Britain, and forced upon the Christian minorities, proved to be a vehicle for cultural and religious ethnocide.

This history of blood, hope, and massacres that Nisan recalls in a masterly way is not over. The martyrdom perpetrated on the Lebanese Christians by the Palestinians and their Muslim allies, the *jihad*-war, the slavery and butchery inflicted on the rebellious non-Muslim Sudanese populations, the oppression of the Copts and the Assyrians, the massacres of the Kurds, the negation of the Berber's cultural rights, the *jihad* against Israel, are all silenced by European governments and the media, the alleged defenders of human rights. Have these ancient and courageous peoples still a chance to deliver themselves from the shackle of dhimmitude, and the manipulations of Eurabia? (http://www.dhimmitude.org/d_today_jihad.php) Now that a new Middle East is being projected, in spite of the old Europe's lethal alliance with the most repressive regimes, maybe the good-luck fairy will pass a second time, to console and redress the cynical injustice inflicted on vulnerable and martyred peoples. Nisan's book is invaluable for a fuller understanding of Middle East history, past and present.

In the mid 19th century, the Turcophile writer Abdolonyme Ubicini described the subjected *dhimmis* of the Ottoman Empire — Christians and Jews — awaiting liberation despite centuries of oppression. Will his observations prove relevant today for the Christian and other ethnic minorities of the Arab-Muslim dominions? :

"The history of enslaved peoples is the same everywhere, or rather, they have no history. The years, the centuries pass without bringing any change to their situation. Generations come and go in silence. One might think they are afraid to awaken their masters, asleep alongside them. However, if you examine them closely you discover that this immobility is only superficial. A silent and constant agitation grips them. Life has entirely withdrawn into the heart. They resemble those rivers which have disappeared underground: if you put your ear to the earth, you can hear the muffled sound of their waters; then they emerge intact a few leagues away. Such is the state of the Christian populations of Turkey under Ottoman rule" A. Ubicini, "Lettres sur la Turquie" (Paris, 1854), 2: 32

Bat Ye'or is the author of three books on Jihad and "dhimmitude". Her latest study, Islam and Dhimmitude. Where Civilizations Collide, (2002) is being reprinted.