The Crossroads of Identity:

Linguistic Shift and the Politics of Identity in Southwest Asia and North Africa

by Marium Abboud Houraney

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

The Wilkes Honors College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Bachelor of Liberal Arts and Sciences

With a Concentration in International Studies

Florida Atlantic University

Jupiter, FL

December 2021

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This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. Timothy J. Steigenga, and has been approved by the members of her supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of The Honors College and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts and Sciences.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my thesis advisor, Dr. Steigenga, for guiding me throughout my undergraduate years and pushing me to my fullest potential in my thesis writing. To my instructors at FAU, whose encouragement and knowledge made me even more enthusiastic about my studies than I ever thought I could be. To Ms. Melon and Mrs. Santos, my 10th and 11th grade English teachers whose kindness, patience, encouragement, and advocacy put me on the path I am today. To my Mama, Baba, siblings, and family overseas for their endless support and love. To my Uncle Mark, whose memory guides me wherever I go, and for inspiring the trip of a lifetime that cast away any doubts I had on myself and my path. And lastly, to Syria, its people, and my loved ones who call it their home; everything I do is for you.

ABSTRACT

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Title: The Crossroads of Identity

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Institution: Wilkes Honors College of Florida Atlantic University

Advisor: Dr. Timothy Steigenga

Degree: Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts and Sciences

Concentration: International Studies

Year: 2021

After the Arab Spring, many ethno-linguistic minority groups in the Southwest Asia and North Africa region found themselves at odds with both their governments and themselves. Periods of Arab conquests, Ottoman rule, European colonialism, Arab nationalism, and most recently, brutal wars and conflicts, have shaped the nationalist ideologies that countries in the region adopted as an attempt to strengthen their states, ultimately resulting in the oppressive policies they direct towards minorities. Kurds, Copts, Assyrians, Amazigh, and other linguistic minorities are some of the last communities keeping indigenous cultures and languages alive. Through utilizing four case studies to examine relations between minority groups in the SWANA region and their respective states and an analysis of the viability of internal preservation efforts and questions of autonomy, I argue that the survival of minority linguistic heritage in the region depends most directly on state tolerance and policies promoting preservation.

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I. Introduction

Maaloula, Minority Heritage, and Preservation in the SWANA Region

Built into the Kalamun mountainside just fifty-six kilometers Northeast of Damascus is Maaloula, a town of roughly two thousand people, one of the last places on Earth where Western Aramaic/Syriac, the language of Christ, is still spoken. Being one of the few villages where the language is still used, Maaloula was often perceived as an example of cultural and linguistic preservation in the face of frequent adversity, and was a popular tourist site for many Syrians, Christian and Muslim alike, before the onset of the Syrian war. Maaloula's geographic isolation and distance from other population clusters once aided in the survival of its linguistic and cultural heritage. But after the modernization of roads and transportation, Maaloula began to slowly succumb to the same fate that many other minority linguistic communities in Syria, and in the greater Southwest Asia and North Africa region, have experienced for over a millennium. This fate, the erosion of linguistic and cultural heritage, was significantly accelerated by the Syrian war, which saw thousands of Maaloula residents fleeing and assimilating into Arab society or abroad.

Despite Maaloula's reputation for successfully preserving its language and its culture, not even this secluded town (a historically significant site for anthropological and linguistic studies regarding Aramaic) could escape this fate. Maaloula locals, scholars, and the Syrian government have all made efforts to respond to the devastating effect that the war had on Maaloula's linguistic and cultural heritage. What did these efforts entail? And what does the preservation of Aramaic and of the rich minority culture of Maaloula truly rely on for its preservation going forward? These are the questions that must be answered not just for Maaloula, but for a variety of other minority linguistic groups in the region, some of whom have had nowhere near the now-threatened success rate that Maaloula has had in modern history. For Maaloula, and for many other minority communities throughout Southwest Asia

and North Africa, whether religious, ethnic, or linguistic, the preservation of their heritage represents a major challenge likely to require the collaboration of both state and non-state actors to truly ensure its success.

Though frequently perceived as a monolith, Southwest Asia and North Africa- commonly referred to as the Middle East and North Africa- is undoubtedly an ethnically, religiously, and culturally diverse region. The presence of diversity, however, does not negate the fact that most of the region is united behind both Islam and a common Arab identity, the latter being an identity with which many minorities in the region have a long and intensely complicated relationship. Minority groups in the region, many of which still face political, cultural, religious, or linguistic suppression, have struggled to hold on to their identities as a variety of factors have caused their numbers to plummet.

The last hundred years have brought a stark decline in minority populations throughout the Southwest Asia and North Africa region. Iraq, for example, saw an 83 percent (Gardner 2019) decline in its native Christian population, dropping from 1.3 million before the U.S. invasion in 2003 to about 250,000 by 2019. Another example can be found in the various Arab Jews indigenous to much of the region. A 1947 census in Egypt counted between 75,000-85,000 Egyptian Jews (Maldanado 2019), today's estimate being a mere 20. In addition to displacement due to war, conflict and political tensions that have become more common in recent decades, minority groups throughout the region face the pressure of assimilation, and erasure of their indigenous identities. These plummeting numbers are a result of either the migration of these groups abroad, physical persecution and violence, or, as is usually the case, assimilation into broader society.

Throughout this thesis, I will seek to examine what has thus far influenced the decline in Southwest Asian and North African minority languages and cultures, what has been done in response to this decline, and what is most effective in terms of preservation. I begin with

a brief overview of the minorities of the region and the history of their diverse languages, faiths, and traditions. To properly understand the roots of the decline in SWANA minorities and minority language uses, we must understand the five main historical events or powers that have driven this decline, as well as what specific modern-day implications they have. The factors that drove this decline are early Arabization in the Islamic era, the Ottoman Empire, European colonialism, Arab nationalism, the Arab Spring, and recent wars and conflicts. I utilize four case studies to examine relations between these minority groups and various states in the region. I conclude with an analysis of the viability of internal preservation efforts and the question of autonomy, and predictions on what would ensure the success of linguistic minority rights in the region going forward.

Language, minority rights, and human rights

Though this thesis will look at the overall state of minority rights in Southwest Asia and North Africa, it will draw an emphasis on the status of minority languages in various nations and societies across the region. Linguistic identity is often tied with national or ethnic identity, so it comes as to no surprise how the loss of language coincides with the loss of one's ethnic, religious, or even national identity.

Language rights and human rights are closely intertwined. A ruling power can assert its authority in enforcing linguistic homogeneity as a deliberate attack on minority groups and an attempt to assimilate them and weaken their own sense of identity. This was a core policy of both the American and Canadian governments in the 19th and 20th centuries when dealing with indigenous populations. North American governments, with the support of the Catholic church (as well as a variety of protestant churches), had a strict policy of forcing Native children into residential schools, where the goal was to "kill the Indian, save the child". As an attempt to strip Native children of their identity, residential schools forcibly cut the children's

hair, mandated Western dress and diet, enforced compulsory conversion to Christianity, and forbade them from speaking their languages (Davis 2001, 20-22). Speaking their indigenous tongue at these residential schools often came with dreadful consequences and further abuse. These schools, tools of settler-colonial states, used English and French as pathways to assimilation.

The topic of indigenous boarding schools gained significant attention throughout the past year, as remains of an additional thousand indigenous children have been recently discovered in unmarked graves in former indigenous boarding schools across Canada (Weisberger 2021). In the United States, the number of indigenous children who have died within these institutions may just be in the tens of thousands, according to Preston McBride of Dartmouth College (Brookes 2021). State hesitancy to conduct proper investigations on finding the exact number of children that have perished at these schools means an exact number still has not been determined. What is known is that these institutions were created with the intention of carrying out cultural, linguistic, and– as this discovery of thousands of deceased indigenous children has shown– physical genocide. This deliberate attempt at cultural and linguistic erasure is unfortunately not exclusive to North America. Many ruling powers in modern history have dabbled in the institutional erasure of minority linguistic and cultural heritage to enforce homogeneity.

However, linguistic erasure is not always institutional, and not always a product of deliberate state attempts to suppress a minority group. Though some states and educational institutions in the Southwest Asia and North Africa region indeed used educational policy to carry out linguistic erasure, and thus assimilate minority groups, this is merely one example of the ways that minority languages in the region have had their relationship to their identities threatened. Often, linguistic erasure happens gradually over time, at the behest of the minority communities themselves, as they attempt to assimilate themselves into broader

society. Deliberate or not, the loss of a language threatens a culture or group's sense of identity. The legal status of a language, as well as preservation efforts, are significant and often reflect identity issues and are, "closely related to national identity and were often determining the relations between majority and minority groups" (Vizi 2016, 430). According to sociolinguistic scholar Joshua Fishman, "[t]he destruction of languages is an abstraction which is concretely mirrored in the concomitant destruction of intimacy, family, and community, via national and international… intrusions, the destruction of local life (and) of the weak by the strong" (Fishman 1991, 4). Severing a minority linguistic group from their indigenous language is only the first step to severing them from other prominent features of their identity. Language is often the glue that connects a group to their indigenous heritage; such is the example of the Amazigh or Berbers of North Africa, as Abderraham El Assiati argues. Like many other groups in the region, language plays a critical role in identity for the Amazigh. He observes that other distinctly Amazigh traits apart from the Tamazight language itself, such as traditional Amazigh jewelry or Amazigh cuisine, are typically generalized throughout broader North African culture or are remotely practiced and even disappear. The state of these other Amazigh traits leaves a heavy burden on the Tamazight language as being the crux of Amazigh identity and the index in which all other Amazigh traits rely on for survival. Assiati explains that: "The most prominent index to ethnicity is linguistic. People define themselves as Imazighen once they speak the Amazigh language. This is not surprising since language does in general constitute a very strong factor in group identity. As Fishman (1989, 27) explains, a distinct language 'is more likely than most symbols of ethnicity to become the symbol of ethnicity to become the symbol of ethnicity'...It is right to assume that language shift among Imazighen is the ultimate threat for an identity claim: once the speaker ceases to speak Amazigh, there remains little about him which would indicate his 'Amazingness'" (Aissati 2001, 59).

As I will explain further in my case studies, even if linguistic groups seemingly assimilate by their own free will, that will is never truly free if there is a prominent force convincing them that it is the only feasible way to guarantee their survival and ability to thrive within that society.

A common theme throughout these case studies is the struggle between these minority groups and the states themselves. In the post-WWII world order, states assert their strength through a degree of social control in the hopes of forming a more unified state. As Joel Migdal argues, social control is "the currency over which organizations in an environment of conflict battle one another. With high levels of social control, states can mobilize their populations, skimming surpluses effectively from society and gaining tremendous strength in facing external foes" (Migdal 1988, 32). Migdal defines a strong state as one that have high capabilities to carry out the tasks of penetrating society, extracting resources, regulating social relationships, and using resources in determined ways (Migdal 1988, 3). According to Migdal, a state can secure its autonomy from various groups by determining preferences over what rules implement and tasking "complex, coordinated bureaus" (Migdal 1988) to implement these rules and establish their presence in various levels of society. In this argument, Migdal offers a scale of three indicators that reflect varying levels of social control. The first and most basic indicator, compliance, is the state's ability to gain conformity to its rules. Compliance initially is carried out through force, such as the use of police in enforcing the law. Other resources and state services, however, must be properly accessed by the state to determine if the state can truly achieve compliance from society. The second indicator, participation, is an even more important indicator of social control, as it strengthens a state by "organizing the population for specialized tasks in the institutional components of the state organization…leaders may want peasants to sell produce to the state cooperative or to employ state-licensed clinic instead of unauthorized healers" (Migdal 1988,

32). Participation means a voluntary contribution to state institutions that can have the potential to benefit both state and society.

The most influential indicator of increasing social control and thus strengthening the state is legitimation. Migdal describes legitimation as more "inclusive" than the other two indicators, because it entails a society that both accepts and approves of the state and its policies based on their own personal convictions that the state is legitimate and right. Legitimation is obviously hard to achieve in states that actively repress and attempt to assimilate minorities, who in turn resent the state. I agree with Migdal's statement of the potency of legitimation in the strengthening of the state. As evident throughout all the case studies I will present, states with inclusive policies that foster heterogeneous societies will have an extraordinarily higher chance of legitimation from the people, who, after collectively benefiting from state policies regardless of their background, will be more likely to accept and approve of the state itself, thus strengthening the state. Therefore, states in the SWANA region must reverse decades of repressive Arab-nationalist policies that target ethno-linguistic minorities and incorporate these minorities into both state and society without risking the survival of their ethno-linguistic heritage. The states that have done so, as I will explain, have indeed succeeded in strengthening their states while also strengthening their societies and taking steps to preserve minority languages and cultures.

To a state that aims to assert its strength and autonomy, particularly post-colonial nations in the SWANA region, distinct minority groups that demand recognition, protection and/or equal treatment by the state, could be perceived as a threat to the possibility of mobilization and social order, thereby preventing the state from having these capabilities. In reality, as many diverse states across the world have proven, a state can be both strong and heterogenous. However, so long as states deny this possibility, unassimilating ethno-linguistic minorities will continue to put up a sturdy resistance to the growth of state

capabilities, only validating the state's hostility to these groups and the perceived threat they pose to state autonomy and enabling them to justify their aggression towards minority identities. This is a cycle that seems to have no end in some parts of the region. As the Amazigh case study will show, however, this is a cycle capable of being broken, but only by the state's ability to meet the demands of the ethno-linguistic minority in question, not out of frustration or social pressure, but out of recognizing that the linguistic, ethnic, cultural, or religious heritage at risk is one part of the nation's greater heritage and identity.

The SWANA region, in its emergence from the grasp of European imperialism, states relied heavily on Arabism as a tool for unifying themselves against imperialist powers and securing their independence. Though recent conflicts in the region have made life significantly harder for minorities in the region, linguistic and otherwise, Arab nationalism, however, in addition to other historical factors, left a legacy in the region, where state policies reflected the idea that strength and unity meant homogeneity. In reality, this goal was not attainable, especially after the legacy that European imperialist states had left. The deep divisions that Europeans had driven into the SWANA region, though briefly forgotten when people across all faiths, sects, ethnicities, and classes within the region had united towards the struggle for independence, had never truly disappeared. After achieving independence, newly formed states in the region grappled with the deep divisions that continued to divide their societies. Unfortunately, SWANA states' collective idea of unifying the various groups in their nations were within the constraints of Arab nationalism, which sought to Arabize minority groups rather than leveling the playing field for all groups so that they could coexist peacefully without sacrificing their identities.

For some groups, like the Kurds, these divisions, mixed with harsh Arabization efforts and discrimination by states they occupy, were extensive enough to inspire goals of autonomy. Aspirations of autonomy were obviously deemed a threat by the states that

minority groups aim to break away from, as these states too aim to secure and protect their own autonomy. The question of autonomy for various minority groups, as well as the complexities surrounding state autonomy in general, is only one variable related to state and society relations, particularly relations between the state and ethno-linguistic minorities. Other key variables related to the relationships between SWANA states and these ethno-linguistic minorities today (and ultimately, the survival of their languages and identities), are education rights, land rights, political participation, social and cultural policy and recognition, and the role of religious institutions. This thesis will also explore internal efforts made by these minority groups to preserve their heritage, whether they be forms of resistance or the establishment of their own cultural institutions. As evident by weighing all these variables throughout the case studies, the activity or inactivity of the state has a far greater impact of the ultimate survival of the survival of minority languages and heritage in the region than internal preservations efforts. The willingness of a state to grant equal rights and protections to minority ethno-linguistic groups, coupled with its conscious effort in enacting measures to preserve the languages and cultures at risk, are what can save the diverse ethno-linguistic groups in the SWANA region from complete erasure.

Who are These Minority Groups? And how does Language Play a Role in Their Societies?

Southwest Asia and Northern Africa have historically been home to many diverse ethnic and linguistic groups. Today, over sixty languages are spoken in the region, with Arabic as the *lingua franca.* Arabic, being a Semitic language, already shared some characteristics with other languages that various peoples of the region spoke pre-Arabization, such as, most directly, Western Aramaic and Hebrew, and more distantly, Eastern Aramaic or Assyrian. These languages themselves have various regional dialects, many of which are

reflected through the Arabic that the locals of these various regions speak today. The many dialects of Arabic across the region reflect the adaptation indigenous populations made after Arabic was introduced, as many dialects mixed in words from their own language with Arabic.

Throughout the rise and fall of empires in ancient history such as the Assyrians, Phoenicians, and Babylonians, different languages and cultures seemed to blend into one another, as power and territory shifted from one empire to the next. The peoples whose languages and cultures did survive countless changes throughout the region's history were further tested by Arab conquests, European imperialism, the creation of modern borders, the rise of nationalism, and recent wars and conflicts, all of which further these group's status as minorities and chipped away at their numbers and status in society. What the Islamic conquests unified, the modern carving up of borders divided, not only leading each new nation-state to question its role in the region and in the international sphere, but leading to various ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups to question their identities and roles within these new borders, legacies of European imperialism and the Sykes-Picot agreement, which carved up the modern-day borders of the region and established French and British mandates that lasted until the region's independence in the 1940s and 1950s.

Within the Southwest Asia North Africa region are several distinct sub-regions that share a variety of cultural, and once, religious similarities. Even within the modern-day nation-states that exist within these sub-regions, there is a degree of diversity and distinct groups of identities. Although there are similarities that connect communities within these subregions, as well as people across SWANA as a whole, by no means should anyone undermine the sheer diversity of the peoples of this region.

The Levant and Iraq, once referred to pre-colonization as Bilad al-Sham, and includes modern-day Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, and Jordan, alone host a variety of minority

groups, who have in recent years struggled immensely with their safety, roles, and rights in their respective nations as war and conflict tears their homelands apart. For the sake of a comprehensive analysis of the minority groups in this region, we will include Asia minor/Anatolia as it shares some minority groups with the Levant and Iraq. Arabic is the majority language in Bilad al-Sham, the Levant hosting various versions of the Levantine dialect and Iraq having its own Iraqi dialect. Anatolia, most of which is in modern-day Turkey, officially consists of a majority Turkish-speaking population.

Bilad al-Sham and Anatolia are both home to both non-Muslim and Muslim minority groups. For many of these non-Arab groups, such as Kurds, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syriacs, Armenians, and Circassians, language is a critical part of their identity, while for many Arabic-speaking minority groups, such as Arab Christians, Druze, Alawites, religion serves as the crux of their identity.

Assyrians, who also may identify as Chaldean, Aramean, or Syriac, are an indigenous ethno-religious group in the Bilad al-Sham, Iraq, and Anatolia/Asia minor region. They are also a linguistic minority, speaking Assyrian, a dialect of Aramaic, and follow three major churches, the Nestorian Catholic Church of the East, the Assyrian Orthodox or Jacobite Church, and the Chaldean Church of Babylon, a Catholic uniate. Towards the end of the Ottoman Empire, Assyrians suffered a horrific genocide alongside Armenians and Greeks, also once part of the empire. This genocide, now called *Seyfo* among many Assyrians, eradicated about half of the pre- World War I Assyrian population, an estimated 250,000 people (Atto 2016, 183). Because of the unreliability of Ottoman statistics, this number is a mere estimate, the true number of victims remains unknown. Following *Seyfo* and World War I, *many* Assyrians became internally displaced within the region, a disbursement further complicated by the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the establishment of the Turkish state, and the formation of new borders mandated by the Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916. In more recent

decades, Assyrians have once again faced the terrors of oppression and displacement during the entirety of Saddam Hussein Ba'athist regime as well as after the onset of the Iraq War. Many Assyrians in Iraq, which has the largest population of Assyrians, fled to the West, particularly Europe, Australia, the U.S., and Canada, or fled to the Kurdish autonomous zone.

The Kurdish people, a non-Arab Muslim ethnolinguistic group found primarily in northern parts of Iraq, Syria, Iran, and Southern Turkey are one of the largest stateless ethno-linguistic groups in the world, with numbers estimated between 25-35 million people (Encyclopedia Britanica, 2021). Kurds were historically nomadic people, who had seasonal migration patterns primarily centered around their herding of sheep and goats and participated in marginal agriculture. The Sykes-Picot Agreement and the advent of European imperialism in the Southwest Asia and North Africa region resulted in a halt to traditional Kurdish migration patterns and ways of life as they became scattered across newly mandated borders and states. The idea of a united Kurdish state never materialized in the birth of modern-day nation-states of the region, and Kurds found themselves not only divided but accountable to various colonial powers and then various states in which they had never chosen to affiliate themselves with. Faced with pressure to assimilate in their various states, Kurdish resistance and hopes of autonomy grew. Though they may have a degree of autonomy in Iran and Iraq (after decades of fighting for it), Kurds still face repressive policies and treatment in Syria and Turkey. Their ongoing struggle for autonomy and relationship with the United States throughout various regional conflicts have often made them the faces of ethnonationalism and minority rights in the region.

Their status as the largest ethnolinguistic minority in the region make Kurds a fitting case study for the topic of linguistic and cultural preservation and minority relations with the state. The autonomy Kurds have in their respective states is something many other minority groups in the region do not have, might this autonomy be the reason they have such success

at largely avoiding assimilation efforts? To answer the question on what is truly required for the preservation of minority linguistic and cultural groups in the region, it is crucial that we look not only at the roles that states and the minority groups themselves play in their survival, but also what policies best foster this preservation. Is autonomy what so many minority groups in the region truly need to succeed in protecting their cultural and linguistic heritage? Or is preservationist state intervention, or even the absence of state intervention altogether, more suiting for this goal? Throughout the case studies presented in this paper, there is no on-size-fits-all approach to this question. Some groups, like the Copts and Syrian Christians, have too much in common with the rest of their respective countries for autonomy to even be considered as the path to preserving their identities. In contrast, Kurds, and to a slightly lesser extent, Amazigh, have historically toyed with (and in the former's case, pursued) the possibility of regional autonomy. Kurds and Amazigh's status as distinct ethno-linguistic groups is what makes them so different from Copts and Syrian Christians, who usually share an ethnic identity with the Muslim population of their countries and typically use their indigenous languages only in liturgical settings. Through studying the Kurds, the various policies of the states in which they populate, and their relative autonomy, we can also compare them to Assyrians of Iraq and Syria, an ethno-linguistic and religious minority group that has suffered at the hands of the same powers that have troubled Kurds, and thus have similar nationalist goals.

Egypt is home to the largest Christian group in the region: Copts. About 10 percent of Egypt's total population, Copts are an increasingly politically mobilized group that have participated alongside their Muslim neighbors in the most pivotal moments in Egypt's modern history. Unlike Kurds or Assyrians, there is little to distinguish Copts ethnically or culturally from Muslim Egyptians. They are not concentrated in any one region of Egypt, such as the Kurds, and do not have a separate spoken language. They are, however, the sole

preservers of the Coptic language, and use it during their liturgies and prayers. Coptic Christians and Muslims in Egypt share the same ancestors, the only difference being that while Muslim Egyptians' ancestors converted from Christianity to Islam, the Coptic Christians' ancestors remained Christian. Their religious practices have roots in pre-Christian pharaonic Egypt, as does the Coptic language, a late phase of the ancient Egyptian language that adopted a Greek script. Though conversational Coptic vanished after the Arabization in Egypt, Copts are determined to keep the language alive within their religious institutions, many even hoping to revive its everyday conversational use. Unlike Kurds, I argue that preserving the Coptic language is not only important for Coptic Christians or the preservation of language in and of itself, but vital in protecting the linguistic heritage of all Egyptians, regardless of faith. Coptic is vital for maintaining Egyptian Christian heritage as the language has historically been a cornerstone of their identity but preserving the Coptic language is within the interests of all Egyptians. Though Arabic is the official language of Egypt and has been since the 10th century, Coptic is an *Egyptian* language, not just an Egyptian Christian language. After all, Coptic quite literally stems from the Greek word for the indigenous people of Egypt, *Aigýptios.*

The most prominent linguistic minority in North Africa are the Amazigh/Imazighen (formerly called Berbers), who speak several different Amazigh languages. Before the Islamization and Arabization of North Africa, most of its inhabitants spoke variations of Amazigh, such as Tachelhit in Central Morocco, Tarifit in northern Morocco, or Kabyle in Algeria, to name a few. Tamazight is a general word describing the Amazigh language, and is spoken in these various dialects throughout Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Mali, Mauritania, Algeria, and Western Sahara.

When the Islamic conquests reached North Africa, Berbers/Amazigh were deployed by Muslim Arabs as warriors and helped them to conquer Spain, or Al-Andalus. By the 14th

century, North Africa was increasingly being Arabized as Arabic replaced written forms of Tamazight. At the same time, Amazigh people were increasingly being driven into the mountainous regions by Arab warriors who sought to stay in the region permanently. Much like other parts of the greater SWANA region at this time, Many Amazigh began to adopt Arabic as their spoken language. Much of the region became Arabized and lost its ties to their indigenous language. The Amazigh that retreated into mountainous regions generally maintained their linguistic and cultural heritage while still adopting the Islamic faith. As of the 20th century till today, Amazigh usually are not concentrated in urban areas but rather in various enclaves throughout the region.

The last century has seen a massive Tamazight revival movement throughout North Africa. This has been met with more openness than other linguistic revival or preservation movements, such as, for example, the efforts of the Assyrians in Iraq. In Algeria and Morocco, Tamazight was integrated into schools through Tamazight language classes and has been recognized as official languages. Amazigh still face various challenges regarding political representation, and many Amazigh groups, such as those in Libya, have been largely Arabized.

Though Berbers/ Amazigh have a variety of cultural traditions and customs that distinguish them from Arabized North Africans, language is the main indicator of their identity. Without it, as we will explore later, many of their rich traditions, customs, and practices are threatened. Numbering at about 30 million (Mohamed Handaine, 2021: *The Indigenous World 2021: Morocco*), Tamazight-speaking Amazigh are a profoundly large Muslim non-Arab minority whose increased political and societal movements have further highlighted the importance and struggle that surround minority linguistic rights.

II. The Historical Background of SWANA Minority Language Decline and Modern Implications

For many minority groups in the SWANA region, modern grievances have deep roots, as do their treatment by their respective states. Many complex historical events contributed to the decline of various minority groups in the region, and more specifically, the decline of minority language usage. Throughout periods of Arabization that began during the Islamic conquests of the 7th and 8th century, Ottoman rule, European imperialism in the SWANA region, Arab Nationalism, and most recently, modern wars and conflicts, many groups of people ended up becoming the minority as the world changed around them. This occurred for one of three reasons. First, the primary reason being voluntary assimilation into the ever-growing Arab World, which has occurred since the Islamic Conquests and further highlighted by Arab nationalism. Second, the displacement and eventual assimilation of minorities into their new homelands in Europe and the Americas, which began towards the end of the Ottoman empire in the late 19th and early 20th century and has been exacerbated by recent conflicts in the region. The last and most troubling reason is genocide, ethnic cleansing, and persecution, a common occurrence for minority groups in the late Ottoman empire and throughout recent decades following conflicts, the rise of terrorist groups, and the Arab Spring. Throughout the Islamic conquests and the subsequent Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties that ruled the SWANA region, the 600-year reign of the Ottoman Empire, European imperial rule, and the emergence of modern nation states, minority groups, both Arab and non-Arab, as well as Muslim and non-Muslim, were subjects of specific policies regarding their roles under each respective rule or period of governance.

Arabization During the Islamic Conquests

Under the rule of the Rashidun caliphs that led successful conquests across the Arabian Peninsula and eventually throughout the entire SWANA region immediately following the prophet Muhammad's death in 632, the first policies regarding minorities emerged, specifically regarding religious minorities. Christians and Jews were considered *dhimmi,* or people of the book, and expected to pay a *jizya* tax in exchange for a degree of protection and exemption for serving in military roles. modern-day Iran was the quickest to accept Islam, with 90% of its population having become Muslim by 950. Unlike Iran, Shaun O'Sullivan argues that "Iraq Syria, North Africa and Egypt lagged behind this very rapid conversion rate, but the result was the same- an almost entirely Muslim population by the 11th century" (O'Sullivan 2006, 314). Some argue that there is a relationship between language shift and early conversion. Jack Tannous cites Tamer el-Leithy, suggesting that "the late conversion of Egypt to Islam was 'likely a precondition' that allowed it to be Arabized in a way that Iran which converted to Islam earlier, never was: 'had significant conversion taken place earlier, bilingualism may have occurred on a wider scale- allowing Coptic to survive as a language of Islam, as Persian did'" (Tannous 2018, 342). This theory may also explain the linguistic shift of Aramaic/Syriac to Arabic. As Tannous notes, "judged by this measure, the ultimate victory of Arabic over Aramaic/Syriac and Greek in other formerly Roman[1] areas, like Syria and Palestine, could be taken, along with the absence of large-scale waves of conversion in these regions, as evidence for the Christian majorities existing there into the second millennium" (Tannous 2018, 342).

As more people converted to Islam during the Islamic conquests, the Southwest Asian and North African region became united by a common Islamic identity, as Islamic leadership was established throughout the region, which eventually paved the way for Arabization, or the adoption of the Arabic language and Arab culture, to occur and initiate the downward

[1] "Roman" is often used to signify former Byzantine, or "Eastern Roman" lands.

trend of the use of minority languages. Though the Islamic conquests rapidly established Islamic leadership throughout the entire region, Arabization was a much slower process. Arabic spread at different paces depending on the specific territory within the region. Many non-Muslim groups slowly began speaking Arabic prior to their mass conversion to Islam, while some groups converted to Islam quite rapidly but didn't adopt Arabic. *Mawali*, or non-Arab Muslims, after decades of tolerance throughout the Rashidun era, found themselves treated as inferior during the Umayyad dynasty. According to historian Jo Van Steenbergen, "[t]raditionally the *Mawali* arrangement of clientage to Arabian leadership has been interpreted as resulting in social inequalities that became increasingly difficult to manage when *Mawali* numbers grew, and that as a result, contributed to the end of the Umayyad-Marwanid rule" (Steenbergen 2021, 77). Though *Mawali* achieved equality and even representation during the subsequent Abbasid caliphate that overthrew the Umayyad dynasty, their numbers decreased as Arabic became more widespread and they used their own indigenous languages less and less.

Though their numbers were once strong enough to help overthrow the Umayyads, modern day *Mawali* within the SWANA region do not have the same numerical advantage when it comes to confronting oppressive policies from their respective states. The treatment that Kurds, Nubians, Berbers, and Amazigh, for example, have faced under modern-day nation states is reminiscent of the second-class treatment *Mawali* under the Umayyad empire faced. However, because of modern-day linguistic groups in the region's minority status, their rights and "autonomy" look much different than that of *Mawali* under the Abbasid caliphate. Many of the *Mawali*, after gaining equal rights in the eyes of the Abbasids, broke off from the caliphate and gained full autonomy, such as the Saffarids and Samanids in Iran and Khurasan (Steenbergen 2021, 78), lands that to this day, because of their complete autonomy early on, retained their linguistic heritage.

Should modern-day minorities in the region follow suit? It is impossible to hold today's minority groups in the SWANA region to the same standard of the *Mawali* during the early Islamic period. Today's minority groups have nowhere near the numbers the Mawali had, and even those that do, have populations that are spread across multiple modern nation-states. For example, Assyrians and Kurds are scattered across several countries in the region such as Syria, Iraq, Armenia, Iran, and Turkey; and Amazigh populate Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. Is it feasible that ethnolinguistic minorities with numbers as strong as the Kurds or Amazigh could unite into autonomous states in today's geopolitical setting and despite modern borders? The unity of the Abbasid dynasty may have empowered many of the *Mawali* of that era to form successful separationist movements and eventually their own autonomous states, but modern borders and the unequal standing of minority groups in the SWANA region today, even non-Arab Muslim groups, make this extremely difficult. This means that modern nation-states where these minorities reside should carry much of the responsibility of creating the conditions in which these minorities can survive and flourish.

The Ottoman Empire and Turkish Nationalism

For over 600 years, the Ottoman empire was a prevalent power in the general landscape of international geopolitics. At its height, the Ottoman Empire ruled over most of Southwest Asia, North Africa, and Southeastern Europe. Its dominion over the adjoining regions of Europe, Asia, and Africa, and its capital, now Istanbul, which is a strategic location where Europe and Asia meet, gave the Empire incredible strategic, economic, and practical advantage. As the essential gateway to the east, the Ottoman empire yielded much of the power over land-based trade, exercising control over the western part of the Silk Road. This prompted European powers to search for alternative routes of accessing trade with the East,

thus leading to the Age of Discovery, and the Columbian exchange.

After the rise of European powers such as the British, French, Portuguese, and Spanish Empires following their arrival to the new world, the Ottoman Empire continued to be a thorn in Europe's side. Though Europe had, for much of its history, feared the Ottomans and their threat to Western European Christendom (hence the crusades in the 14th and 15th centuries), they became a much more manageable threat after Western Europe had gained the advantage of the Columbian exchange [2] and their own access to resources. This competition, along with a rise in poor leadership and military incompetence from the Ottomans, weakened the empire. As Europeans began to dominate global trade and emerge as global superpowers and the Ottoman empire crumbled from within its own leadership, Ottoman influence continued a trajectory of steady decline after the 1683 failed siege on Vienna, until its eventual collapse after World War 1.

The Ottoman Empire, for most of its history, gave Christians and Jews a protected status under its *millet* system. These protected groups, or *dhimmis,* were granted "considerable autonomy in organizing their religious affairs, education, and family law… each community (millet) was governed by its own religious leader, selected by its members and approved by the Sultan" (Belge and Karakoc 283), like *dhimmis* under the early Islamic dynasties. This state-supported autonomy and protected status, however, fell apart in the final decades of the Ottoman empire. With dwindling power, unfruitful attempts at modernization, and humiliating military losses, most significantly that of its World War I involvement, the empire's attempts to tighten its grasp on its diverse citizenry and, engulfed with a new sense of ethnic nationalism, realize a true Turkish state resulted in state-sanctioned genocides, ethnic cleansing, and oppression of many minority groups, the same minorities who

[2] Exchange of crops, goods, resources, diseases, and ideas between the old world and the new world after the discovery of the Americas by Europeans

previously enjoyed a long period of autonomy and protection. This included the genocide of up to 1.5 million Armenians within the empire, and around the same time, the Greek and Assyrian genocides. All three of these events resulted in a mass exodus, whether by force or choice, of minority groups out of what is today modern-day Turkey. To this day, the Turkish state has not claimed any responsibility for these genocides, and still routinely discriminates against ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities such as Kurds and Assyrians, many of whom have left Turkey and formed diasporas across the world. Additionally, the late Ottoman era and involvement in World War I led to severe famine and poverty in the Levant region, most significantly that of Mount Lebanon, which caused the migration of thousands of Levantine Christians to the Americas, many of whom assimilated into American, Canadian, and Latin American societies.

Overall, the policies of the late Ottoman empire and Kemalist Turkey, though officially disregarded, still inform the way that the Turkish government deals with minority groups. Additionally, the late Ottoman genocides and financial neglect of the Levant are largely responsible for much of the emigration of Christians from the Levant. This led to large diasporas in North and South America, many of whom assimilated and lost their cultural and linguistic ties.

European Imperialism

As the Ottoman empire crumbled, European imperial powers finally resolved the eastern question as they devised plans on dividing and claiming formerly Ottoman lands. The Europeans' competition over Ottoman territories and subsequent partitioning thereof was decades in the making, and greatly shaped the relationship between the colonial powers and Gulf Arabs, whose roles in the campaigns against the Ottomans would transform the region.

In the century preceding the agreement that would finalize European imperial

dominance in the SWANA region, Europe and arguably, the west as whole, was carefully laying the groundwork for their influence in the region through missionaries. Missionaries sent by nations such as France, Britain, and even the United States arrived at the region in the early 19th century. Immediately failing at converting Muslim populations, they looked towards the indigenous Christians of the region in the hopes Christian unity would draw them closer to their message. These missionaries, supported by their respective nations, did not often have the most compelling motivations, and those who did, executed their missions in concerning ways that threatened the integrity of existing SWANA Christian tradition. While British missionaries often traveled to the region to act as protectors and advocates of eastern churches and their traditions, French and American missionaries, in contrast, carried with them supremacist values that entrenched in them a goal of westernizing these ancient churches and Christian communities and mold them into their image (Irwin 2018). Irwin, through reviewing two books that draw heavily upon Edward Said's work on cultural imperialism: Andrew Wilcox's *Orientalism and Imperialism* as well as *Restating Orientalism: A Critique of Modern Knowledge* by Wael Hallaq, concludes that these western missionaries were "agents of cultural imperialism" (Irwin 2019, 656). Westernization, like Arabization, posed a threat to the cultural and linguistic heritage of many of the region's Christians and minority groups as whole. Much like the policy of the state itself, missionary groups often deepened rifts between various religious, ethnic, and linguistic groups in the region as a type of "divide and conquer" strategy to suppress the unity required to end their rule. These divisions, relied upon by the French to make the region's Christians feel dependent on them, left a deadly legacy as these fragmentations grew, particularly in Lebanon, where decades- long sectarian violence devastated the nation. This colonial strategy, as Joel Migdal argues, would greatly shape post-independence politics:

> By supporting the viability of some strategies of survival and not other, the colonialists deeply influenced how individuals would order their universe. Tribes, linguistic communities, and ethnic groups changed dramatically in the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries, in large part because of the colonialist support of certain forms of social organization. (Migdal 1988, 130)

This intense social fragmentation left behind by Europeans, be they missionaries or European imperial powers themselves, not only define how various groups within modern states in the SWANA region interact with each other but define the way these states interact with these groups. Social control remains a defining factor in Migdal's model of state-society relations, and he argues that the fragmentation of this social control "affects the character of the state, which in turn, reinforces the fragmentation of society" (Migdal 1988, 257). The result of this, ironically, is the reinforcement of a "weblike" distribution of social control rather than the transformation into a pyramid-like distribution which states strive-towards. Weblike social control, however, does not mean the triumph of ethno-linguistic minorities and the failure of the state, but rather is reflective of the cycle in which the state's effort to exert social control on minority groups through attempts at homogenization only fuels resistance further, despite the plummeting numbers within these groups. The outcome of this cycle are states that, through their flawed approach of strengthening their autonomy, reinforce divisions and hostility towards their sovereignty, and ethno-linguistic minorities that struggle to hold on to their heritage, but still manage to cling on to their resistance so long as the state gives them reason to resist. In addition, this cycle discourages the legitimation Migdal describes as essential to the state's ability of social control.

The first instance of European rule in the SWANA region occurred long before the fall of the Ottomans, being the French colonization of the formerly Ottoman Algeria in 1830. In the Scramble for Africa, France has asserted its colonial rule in various regions of the

continent, and North Africa was no exception. After colonizing Algeria, Tunisia was declared a French protectorate in the early 1880s, Morocco too becoming a protectorate in 1912. The British followed suit, occupying Egypt (which was previously occupied by the French for 3 years 1798-1801) in 1883 during the Anglo-Egyptian war. The final seal of European control of the region came in 1916, amid the first World War, when France and Britain, with the approval of Imperial Russia, had conspired a secret agreement to carve what was left of the Ottoman Empire into spheres of influence. Syria and Lebanon became acquired as zones of French rule, while Britain, after giving false hopes of self-determination to Hashemite Arab leaders during the Ḥusayn-McMahon Correspondence (1915–16), continued to claim influence in southern Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq), the Mediterranean ports of Haifa and Acre, and Transjordan (now Jordan). Palestine, though initially ruled by an international regime in accordance with the agreement, was approved as a British territory at the San Remo conference in 1920, which was approved by the League of Nations in 1922, establishing the British Mandate of Palestine. Only a few years prior, the Balfour Declaration announced British support for the establishment of Palestine as a national home for the Jewish people, accelerating the arrival of European Jewish refugees to Palestine. Like Palestine, the territories that would become modern day Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq also became official French and British territories in 1920, with new, European-made borders that would trouble the region to this day.

These new borders severed the historic connections between various peoples in the former Ottoman empire and resulted in the split of once large and unified ethnic groups into smaller communities under the rule of nation states they had never consented to be a part of. Prime examples of this are Kurds, Assyrians/Syriac, and the Amazigh, all of which to this day, face political, cultural, and economic oppression and the former two facing persecution and ethnic cleansing. Splitting up these ethnolinguistic groups among new nation states with

arbitrary borders decided by a foreign power into smaller communities under these new states made these now "minorities" vulnerable and to a degree, powerless in their own administration. Though there were many downsides to Ottoman rule, one positive aspect of the 600-year Ottoman reign was the local and regional autonomy and unity ethno-linguistic and even religious minorities enjoyed.

Colonial powers continued the "divide and conquer" approach established by their missionaries to keep indigenous population under their boot. This was a policy they directed to any groups they newly deemed a minority. In addition to applying this divisive approach to Christians, they had also applied it to indigenous Arab Jews of the region. In his study of post-colonial roots of contemporary Arab identity, Massoud Hayoun explains that "the imperialists separated Jews and Christians from Muslims and the rich from the poor. They drove wedges into our very households… these separations-across countries, cities, and households- weakened the state and facilitated the systemic rape of our lands and our people" (Hayoun 2019, 95-96).

The division that colonial powers ingrained into the SWANA laid the foundations for many issues still present today- sectarianism in Lebanon, the Kurdish problem in Syria, Iraq, Turkey, and Iran, - but one consequence that had been reached early on was the state of Arab Jews. Indigenous to most countries in the region, Arab Jews were integral parts of their respective societies. Syrian and Iraqi Jews once played an important role in trading, and Egyptian Jews, like Layla Mourad, achieved much success in Arab music and cinema. Colonial powers, however, through driving divisions into the SWANA region, compromised the long and rich history of Jews in the region. Upon the rise of Zionist sentiment among the European Jewry, Jewish nationalism was increasingly introduced to Jewish Arabs in colonial schools in the region. Colonial powers, after agreeing on the establishment of a national Jewish home in Palestine, continued to drive divisions into the SWANA region that decades

later would prompt the majority Muslim and even Christian population of the region to antagonize Arab Jews and question their national loyalty, leading to the majority of the region's Jews to either become exiled or flee to the West or to the newly formed Israeli state (Hayoun 2019, 169).

The weakened state of these fractured ethno-linguistic and religious minorities made these groups and their languages more vulnerable to the wave of Arabization and Arab nationalism that swept the region in the post-colonial era. In the case of Arab Jews, the colonial era had fueled animosity towards their communities that led to their near erasure from their homelands. Imperial powers deliberately contributed to various heightened divisions, particularly after the establishment of Palestine as a national home for Jews. These factors furthered a slippery slope of instability in the region. Whether it be the displacement of indigenous people, territorial conflicts, or in our case, laying the foundations for Arab nationalism and Arabization that would further threaten the endangered status of many ethno-linguistic groups in the region, all represent legacies of European imperialism in the SWANA region. No matter how much time passes since the colonial era, we can still clearly identify its consequences.

Arab nationalism

Like the rest of the world, the SWANA region was swelling with nationalist sentiment as a rebellion against European imperialism. What Europe divided nationalists meant to unite, often through a unified ethnic identity, leading to Arab nationalism to gain an even stronger foothold in the region.

Arab nationalism itself has roots that stretch even farther back than European imperialism, all the way back to during Ottoman rule of the region. Despite these deep roots, however, Arab nationalism has never had a steady foundation. Arab nationalism, despite its

immense popularity throughout the late eighteenth to mid-twentieth century, ultimately failed at truly uniting the then 200 million Arabic speaking peoples of the region. In its nature, Arab nationalism is reactionary and short-lived, as found in the example of the United Arab Republic, which united Nassar's Egypt with Syria for three brief years before Syria split from the union. In theory, the UAR was meant to unify the Arabs of Egypt and Syria into a singular, strong state and promote Arab unity. In practice, Syria and Egypt were not compatible, and not as similar as they had originally believed.

Secular Arab nationalism drew the interest of many Arabic-speaking Christians in particular, who, starting in the mid-19th century, brought about a revival in Arabic literature. Previously under the rule of an empire whose core measure of identity is Islam, secular Arabism offered a new measure of identity that would unify Arabic speakers of all faiths and eradicate past inequalities. Arabism and the unification it offered to Christians and Muslims evolved into full-on Arab-nationalism and the emergence of Arab nation-states following the fall of European imperial rule. Michel Aflaq, a Syrian Orthodox Christian, was in fact a prominent Arab nationalist and considered the father of the Ba'ath party, promoting Arab unity. This unity, however, did not please all Arab Christians. Aramaic/Syriac speaking Christians felt left out and pressured to speak Arabic as speaking the language was considered the sole requirement to then qualify as an Arab. Other non-Arab groups such as Kurds and Amazigh also never got to reap the benefits of Arabism. Their existence as ethno-linguistic minorities, in addition, was often seen as a threat to Arab nationalism, as proven by the immense number of discriminatory policies that states in the Arab world imposed on them at the height of Arab nationalism and even to this day.

Arab nationalism's role as, Martin Kramer identifies it, a "mistaken identity" (Kramer 2017) was made clear during the 1967 Arab Israeli war. Arab nations, often dragged into crises by other Arab states, had reached a breaking point in 1967 that had essentially worked

as a final nail on the coffin of Arab nationalism. These crises, Kramer explains, could "deteriorate quickly into war, and exact a steep price in lives, territory, and prestige. Many of these states already lumbered under immense economic burdens. They did not have the means to assume the burdens of their neighbors, especially the weighty load of Palestine. Even mighty Egypt could no longer assume the sole custodianship of the Arab cause. If these states were ever to set their own priorities, they would have to justify openly their separate existence, and demand the primary loyalties of their citizens and subjects" (Kramer 1993, 189). Even after Arab nationalism faded away, there still existed a state of Arab superiority in the region, reflected in the many suppressive policies in the region that addressed non-Arab minorities. We need not look further than the ban on the Assyrian language in Saddam' Hussein's Iraq, or the attempted Arabization of Syrian Kurds. Arab nationalism, though it has failed on a geo-political scale, still lingers within the governments of the region and their policies regarding minority rights, particularly minority language rights. Though pan-Arabism may not have been able to unite the Arab world, states often think imposing Arabism within their national borders will unite their country when the repercussions can threaten the ethno-linguistic heritage of many of these state's non-Arab minorities. In threatening these minorities, states distance themselves from legitimation and thus true social control required to strengthen the state. Instead, they encourage not only a mass emigration the minority but the growth of resistance in those that remain and refuse to comply with assimilation

III. The Arab Spring: A United Front?

Decades of undemocratic rule across Southwest Asia and North Africa hit a tipping point in 2010 when Mohammed Bouazizi, a Tunisian vegetable vendor, lit himself on fire in protest of the sudden seizure of his food stand under the capricious reasoning that he did not

have a permit. Protests erupted in Tunisia's capital following Bouazizi's act of protest, and Tunisians ultimately succeeded in pushing Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, their authoritarian president of 20 years, to the point of abdication. In 2011, Tunisians finally held a democratic election. Inspired by these events, Egyptians took to the streets to protest their own dictator of over 30 years, Hosni Mubarek. The same year, Bahrain followed suit as citizens gathered in massive anti-government protests, which were suppressed.

For Syria, Yemen and Libya, the Arab Spring took a much darker turn as all three nations erupted into civil wars. Syria so far has been the only state of the three in which the government still holds power and has so far claimed victory throughout the war. But regardless of the different fates the Yemeni, Syrian, and Libyan governments have experienced, the conflicts, and extent of the devastation these wars have caused, seem to have no tangible end or consolation in sight.

Despite any divisions that may exist within various SWANA states, the initial phase of the Arab Spring was an incredible moment in history where people united against a common adversary: authoritarian regimes. This wave of societies overpowering the state fits within Migdal's state-society relations model. A state that fails to mobilize and gain the support of even its most remote citizens, that lacks strongmen that offer support for survival for their communities, and fails to meet the needs of its people, is a weak state that inspires a strong and frustrated society. In the case of the Arab spring, many states, despite the authoritarian extent of their political and economic control, remained weak due to their failure in gaining the support and subsequent mobilization of the people without the tactic of coercion. Often, the leaders of these states even fail in mobilizing lower-level state institutions and officials, resulting in what Migdal calls the "big shuffle," which is "a mechanism of deliberately weakening the arms of the state and allied organizations to assure the tenure of the top state leadership" (Migdal 1988, 217). No matter how much power authoritarian leaders seemed to

have gained, and regardless of the resources as their disposal, Migdal argues that "their basic weakness in the face on continued fragmentation of social control has led them to a political style and policies- the politics of survival- that have prevented the state from enhancing its capabilities by not allowing the development of complex organization in state institutions" (Migdal 1988, 236). Complex organizations within the framework of the state are what allow state outreach to even the most remote communities. These organizations are often, in the "first world", responsible for providing attention and specialized service in the realms of food insecurity, education, business rights, safety, infrastructure, housing, etc. These organizations, such as Morocco's Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture founded in 2001, may also be the key to not only giving ethno-linguistic minorities the recognition they deserve, but providing them with an official, state-backed institution that works to both preserve their ethno-linguistic heritage and respond to their concerns. Morocco, in this case, exerted a positive version of social control in which it attempted to mobilize and reach out to even the most remote Amazigh by recognition and allowing them to participate in greater society without the caveat of Arabization, a policy which had previously fueled Amazigh resistance. This type of social "control" doesn't indicate the states attempts to control society with an iron fist and strict expectations as it had tried before with Arab nationalism. Rather, this type of social control indicates that the state can succeeded in maintaining a heterogeneous state where it could branch out beyond the immediate reach of the capital and mobilize its various groups of people without asking them to sacrifice their identities.

Unlike Morocco, the states that saw uprisings during the Arab Spring not only failed to reach out to ethno-linguistic groups on a positive social level but neglected their citizens by failing to develop organizations that could truly heal the fragmented state of social control in their respective nations. As a result, little to no mobilization occurred, and entire nations felt the weight of the states' economic and political power without reaping any of the benefits,

thus feeling alienated. This alienation, both on a societal level as well as on a state level, led to an authoritarian shift that established the perfect condition for a revolution. Dictatorships across the region, no matter how long they had been in place, were in for a severe reckoning following the movement Mohammed Bouazizi inspired in making his frustration known to the world, and weak states quickly fell to strong societies.

The Arab Spring both united and divided many countries in the region in various ways. In Egypt, what seemed to be a united revolutionary front against Hosni Mubarak split and further fueled sectarian tensions after the election of Mohammad Morsi. Though Muslims and Coptic Christians alike joined the opposition to the newly elected Muslim Brotherhood leader, Copts were often blamed by the Muslim Brotherhood for the eventual ousting of Morsi a year after his election. Violent attacks against Coptic individuals and Coptic churches and institutions rose dramatically as the Muslim Brotherhood scrambled to punish Copts for their political activity and opposition to the MB leader they had worked tirelessly to get elected. This heightened persecution led to another wave of Coptic Christian emigration to North America, Europe, and Australia. In addition, Morsi's extremist allegiances had caught the concern of many Muslims, who eventually supported the coup that overthrew Morsi and instilled Abdel Fattah al-Sisi into power.

Unlike Copts, Syrian Christians had stood by the Syrian government throughout the entirety of the Syrian war. For the most part, it is difficult for Syrians to imagine what Syria would look like without the Assad regime due to the fear of extremist groups such as Al-Qaeda, ISIS, or the MB seizing control of the opposition, similar to what happened in Egypt when Muslim Brotherhood gained power under the brief Morsi presidency. Though most of the nine Syrian Christian patriarchs give their unwavering support to Assad, the one patriarch whose support is questionable puts it like this: "Syria was a type of dictatorship, a one-party dictatorship or a sectarian dictatorship… I'm not saying that we Christians need to be

protected by a regime of this kind. But we do fear violent change" (Oehring 2017, 10). Many Syrian Christians, as well as Syrian Muslims, feared joining the opposition and betting on an uncertain future. Those that were willing to openly oppose the Assad regime were violently suppressed or persecuted, and the growing divisions in Syrian society at the beginning of the Arab Spring left the nation vulnerable to foreign intervention, be it from the United States, Russia, or terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda and ISIS. Though the early anti-Assad opposition may have had a sense of unity, today it is unorganized, divided, and vulnerable to extremist influences. Many Syrians today, weary of war and irrespective of their true opinions on their president, do not actively oppose Bashar al-Assad anymore as they believe a better alternative may no longer be feasible. After the more than decade of strife that erupted across the country following the Arab Spring, Syria is not only physically and economically devastated, but more divided and sectarian than ever before. Not only did the war devastate the lives of Syrians, but the instability also devastated its rich heritage, whether it be the destruction of ancient ruins like that of Palmyra by extremists, or the fleeing of linguistic minorities from their homes in Maaloula or elsewhere.

The conflicts that erupted after the Arab Spring have only exacerbated the dire condition many ethno-linguistic minorities had already been subjected to. More and more of these ethno-linguistic minorities flee the region, and the communities that they had once been a part of grow further from its cultural and linguistic heritage as the protectors thereof leave the region and negligent and often oppressive leaders ignore their plight.

The Arab Spring introduced the prospect of minority rights as tools for democratic reform, which Jacob Mundy refers to as 'transformative minority politics', or "a form of minority politics that strengthens democratic reform in the region, and that helps deepen a culture of human rights and democratic citizenship" (Pföstl and Kymlicka 2015). Undemocratic states, however, see minority rights issues as divisive and counterintuitive to

their national cause, which relies on homogeneity for its unity. Now, however, a greater emphasis on common interests rather than common ethnolinguistic or religious identity has been stressed by democratic reformers. States can maintain unity while also celebrating pluralism, democratic reformers argue. Unfortunately, states in the SWANA region have remained reluctant to accept pluralism or address minority issues without expecting unwavering loyalty in return.

IV. Coptic Egyptians: A Case Study

Perhaps one of the most prominent minority Christian groups in the region, Coptic Egyptians have long struggled with discrimination and a general struggle to preserve their ancient religious and linguistic heritage in an Arabic-dominant society. Numbered at about ten million, or ten percent of Egypt's population, Copts are the largest Christian group in the SWANA region.

Despite the Islamic conquest of Egypt in 639 AD during the Rashidun era, Egypt remained a majority Christian land until the 10th-12 centuries when mass conversions resulted in Christians becoming the minority. The Arabization of the Egyptian population, however, occurred long before the Islamization thereof. The Coptic conversion to Islam occurred in two waves: the first being during the ninth century and the second during the Mamluk period in the 14th century (O'Sullivan 2006, 305). Once the official language of pre-Islamic Egypt, Coptic declined in use as the Arabic language became more widespread. Arabic particularly became widespread in "administrative communication and recording" (Sijpesteijn 2009, 358) such as tax receipts.

The *Apocalypse of Samuel of Qalamun (ASQ)*, an Egyptian Christian text believed to have been written no later than the fourteenth century, gives context to the transition from Coptic to Arabic in Egypt. Though ironically written in Arabic, this text argued that the

disuse of Coptic in Egypt resulted in a sort of "religious apathy" (Zaborowski 2007, 27) among Egyptian Christians. Since church texts, scriptures, liturgies, and prayers were all documented in Coptic, the disuse of the language in exchange for Arabic meant a steep decline in theological understanding over time among Egyptian Christians. This distancing from Christian identity made Egyptians more inclined to eventually convert to Islam during the medieval era. Despite this phenomenon and the warning of the dire effects of Arabization indicated in the ASQ, J.R. Zaborowski argues through analyzing this text that "as the Coptic communities became increasingly linguistically Arabized, the Coptic language increasingly served as an indexical symbol of Coptic Christian identity" (Zaborowski 2007, 36). This adverse effect of Arabization is common among non-Arab minority groups. Though the decline in use of the Coptic language slowly contributed to the conditions of 'religious apathy' suitable to aid conversions to Islam, the Mamluk period saw a dramatic increase in active persecution against Copts, and conversion by coercion. O'Sullivan cites historian al-Maqrizi "whose Kitab al-Khitat, compiled from the early 1420s, records a series of eight assaults against the Copts during the early Mamluk period from 1250 to 1354" (O'Sullivan 2006, 306). He directly quotes Al-Maqziri's work: "In all the provinces of Egypt, both North and South, no church remained that had not been razed; on many of these cites, mosques were constructed. For when the Christians' affliction grew great and their incomes small, they decided to embrace Islam. Thus, Islam spread among the Christians of Egypt… From that time on, lineages became mixed in Egypt" (O'Sullivan 2006, 307). Despite numerous Coptic revolts around this time, many grew weary of resistance and gave in to the pressure of conversion. After the peak of Islamization in Egypt in 1354, only 10 percent of Egypt remained Coptic Christian (O'Sullivan 2006, 307). The Mamluk sultans did little to intervene in attacks against Christians during the Mamluk era. This period of intense persecution ended with the government confiscating "all the lands in Egypt held as *waqfs* by Christian churches

and monasteries. These lands were the main source of revenue for Christian institutions, yet they amounted to only 25,000 feddans- that is, a few hundred square kilometers in a country possessing at least 25,000 square kilometers of cultivated land" (O'Sullivan 2006, 316).

Though the Arabization of Egypt directly aided mass conversions to Islam, those who remained Christian began relying on the Coptic language as the crux of their identity, despite its steep decline in conversational and everyday usage. This is especially evident in recent decades among Coptic Christians and Coptic diasporas. Despite many Coptic texts and biblical scripture being translated into Arabic for the sake of convenience, Coptic Christians, who now speak Arabic, continue to rely on the Coptic language in their liturgies and religious settings.

The 1930s and 1940s saw an increase in religious revivalism among middle- and lower-class Copts. Greater emphasis was placed on theological education for clergymen, and a Sunday school movement emerged. In addition to the goal of preserving and encouraging pride in Coptic Christian identity, this was also done is response to the increasing threat of Catholic and Protestant missionaries in Egypt. In his analysis of Coptic revivalist efforts like the Sunday school movement and contemporary Coptic identity, Mareet Adly explains that "The development of Sunday schools was originally a Protestant idea that gained sympathizers towards the end of the nineteenth century (Hassan, 2003, 74; S. Tadros, 2013, 100). The threat posed by Protestant Sunday schools to the Coptic Orthodox church was the third reason that arguably encouraged early individual efforts to start Sunday schools in different parts of Egypt"(Adly 2019, 82). The Sunday school movement, still active among most Coptic churches to this day, encouraged the instilling of not just Coptic religious values, but an instilling of knowledge of Coptic Egyptian history and its pharaonic roots in children as young as five. This included an effort in teaching the Coptic language. Though not taught for conservation purposes, the Coptic language teachings popularized by the Sunday School

Movement played in an important role in preservation, even if taught solely for prayer or reading church texts: “one important goal for the SSM was to popularize the Coptic language with all the meanings and connotations it carries” (Adly 2019, 88).

Despite the Sunday school movement, the push for increased education of clergymen, and of church participation- all of which would in theory help to preserve Coptic linguistic heritage- Copts would continue to steadily migrate out of Egypt due to their lack of representation in government and in the public sector, and often, assimilate into their new countries, once again threatening their rich linguistic heritage.

In contrast to the narrative claim that little has changed for Copts since the onset of their oppression under early Islamic rule, the economic, political, social, and religious status of the Copts have varied with each modern regime.

Despite the narrative that some would like to push, Coptic Egyptians have long stood in solidarity with their Muslim neighbors in pivotal moments in Egypt’s modern history- sometimes despite the instruction of the Coptic religious hierarchy (as was seen during the 2011 revolution). We see this in response to British colonialism, a time where both Christians and Muslims were engulfed in a liberal, secular political climate that prioritized anti-imperialist ideals. Anti-imperialist attitudes planted the seeds for Arab nationalism in the region, and Egyptian nationalism, especially that of the Wafd party post World-War I (Pennington 1983, 161), united Egyptians of all faiths against a common enemy: the British. What followed was a swift transition in power when Gamel Abdel Nasser and the Free Officers seized power in 1952.

Since Egypt’s independence from Britain, key issues that defined the relationship that Copts had with the Egyptian state have, much like other minority groups in the region, been issues regarding education, land, social and cultural policy, the role of the Coptic church, and political participation. Though Copts do not quite face much distinctive discrimination

regarding education and land, they, particularly under Nasser, were indirectly affected by new waves of reforms on the issues based on class.

Though many Copts, particularly youth, had leaned left politically, the leftism that Nasser espoused rarely aligned with their interests. Nasser paid no mind to religious differences, and neither did his policies. At the time, Copts enjoyed a period of economic success in Egypt pre-revolution, especially in the private sector. Nasser's nationalization of the private sector hit Copts particularly hard, or at least upper-class Copts. As Pennington puts it, "the nationalizations which followed hit large businesses dominated by Copts, such as the Magar and Morgan bus companies and the Banque du Caire. The squeezing of the private sector hit Copts lower down the economic scale by diminishing business activity and restricting the career opportunities open to them" (Pennington 1983, 163).

Nasser's land redistribution had more complicated implications for Copts: though the redistribution of land meant the splitting of estates owned by wealthier Copts, Coptic peasants, on the other hand, benefited from this policy. As for recruiting for government jobs, the Nasser regime's shift towards merit-based recruitment initially benefited Copts, who at the time boasted higher levels of education. This, however, was fleeting, as the Nasser regime scrambled to make recruitment appear fairer and as a result reduced Coptic recruitment. With little representation in the government and little access to work in the public sector, many Copts felt discriminated against, despite Nasser's policies having nothing to do with ill will towards them. This marked the beginning of a mass emigration of Copts to North America and Australia, an emigration that surged following the Arab Spring.

Nasser's regime was staunchly opposed to the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist factions, and went to great lengths to suppress them, ultimately benefitting Coptic Christians who were usually villainized by said groups. Though his policies were rooted in secular leftism and never intended to adversely affect Copts, they still left Copts feeling neglected.

Even during the regimes of Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak- Copts still were vastly underrepresented in the government and public sector. State gestures to appease Copts were often symbolic, and Copts were rarely, if ever, appointed to top positions in fear of provoking the majority in thinking they were receiving any type of preferential treatment-instead, Copts would occasionally receive a token second-rank position. To this day, political representation remains an issue with Copts. As of 2016, Copts only occupy 36 of 596 seats in Egyptian Parliament, or 6.04 percent (Yerkes, 2016) despite making up ten percent of the population. This is undoubtedly and improvement from the past, but overall Copts still struggle with political marginalization.

As Coptic Patriarch Pope Shenouda played an increasingly political role in Egyptian society and gave his unwavering support to President Hosni Mubarak following his previous home imprisonment under Anwar Sadat, some concessions were given to the Coptic church in exchange of Pope Shenouda's support. These concessions, however, benefited the Coptic hierarchy more so than Copts themselves. Despite Pope Shenouda's refusal to support the revolution that would ultimately oust Mubarak in 2011, many Copts still participated in anti-regime demonstrations and worked in tandem with their Muslim neighbors to put an end to the dictatorship. What Copts did not anticipate, however, was the Muslim Brotherhood officially stepping into power with the election of Dr. Mohammed Morsi as Mubarak's successor. In the decades before the January 25th revolution, sectarianism in Egypt had been steadily on the rise. The Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups had come out of the shadows and gained increased political traction under Sadat, who had sympathized with them and frequently reinforced his belief in the Islamic character of Egypt. Attacks on Churches became more common under Sadat and continued to occur under Mubarak. Pope Shenouda and the Coptic ruling class began to rely on the Mubarak regime for protection.

Pope Shenouda seized many important Coptic institutions, including exerting his

control over the millet council, once the official representative of the Copts to the state. The Church itself, with the Patriarch at its head, became the official representative of the Copts, or more so, the slim Coptic upper class. According to Guirgis, this shift in representation from a civil to religious system fanned the growing flames of sectarian tension, since "this position has been strengthened-and sectarian tensions increased-by the church's adoption of policies that serve to isolate the Coptic community within the church, establishing an alternative social life strictly for Copts, in an attempt to exert more control over them" (Guirgis 2012, 52). This coincided with the spread of Wahhabi ideology among Muslim Brotherhood members, who briefly tolerated Copts so long as they filled the role of a "passive minority". This was as Hager puts it, "a modernization of attitudes towards Christians while paradoxically laying the groundwork for legitimizing violence against them" (Hager 2019, 291). This very brief period of Egyptian unity came to an end under the election of Muhammad Morsi and rise of the Muslim Brotherhood to power. Copts became an increasingly political minority, and the Muslim Brotherhood immediately marginalized them and justified their persecution.

Most recent concerns for Copts typically include issues regarding marriage and land rights, permits to approve building and renovation of churches, and the continued disappearance of young Coptic women (Hager 2019, 294) and, most significantly, attacks on churches. The heightened persecution that followed the rise and fall of Muhammad Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood caused another wave of Coptic migration out of Egypt. Despite the many initiatives undertaken by Copts and the Coptic church to preserve their rich religious and linguistic heritage, without the protection and intervention of the state, Coptic Egyptians will continue to leave Egypt. In addition to being targeted by extremist groups, Copts still face a variety of legal and institutional challenges such as personal status and family law conflicts in Islamic courts, obtaining permits to build and repair churches, and maintaining

their own cultural institutions with scarce monetary help from the Egyptian government.

The relationship between Copts and the Egyptian state is an interesting representation of Joel Migdal's state-society relations model, which stressed the inseparability of the nature of the state and society as well as state reliance on centralized social control to strengthen the state. The Egyptian state, like others in the region, has constantly sought to affirm its power by mobilizing society. As Migdal argues, this "involves channeling people into specialized organizational frameworks that enable state leaders to build stronger armies, collect more taxes (especially important in maintaining those armies), and complete any other number of complicated tasks" (Migdal 1988, 21). Nasser's sweeping reforms that uprooted the Coptic elite, as well as the relationships between Mubarek and the Coptic pope, had all worked to mobilize Copts as good Egyptian citizens without really addressing their pressing concerns and demands. This is a theme present in many of the region's minorities, who states aim to mobilize as tools despite these groups' constant resistance to social control.

Though Copts have larger success rates with linguistic preservation than other Christian minorities in the region, the future of the Coptic language still hangs in the balance so long as the Egyptian state maintains a neutral or aggressive stance towards Copts. Regardless of how passionately Copts try to preserve their own linguistic and religious identity, the intervention of the state is the most important factor to achieving this goal, as Pennington argues, "[t]heir (Copts) fortunes have always depended very much on the whim of rulers of a persuasion other than their own, pagan, Byzantine Orthodox or Muslim" (1983, 163). This not only includes granting Copts equal legal and sociopolitical status to their Muslim neighbors, and protecting them from violent extremism, but funding and supporting their cultural and linguistic institutions. Copts are ethnically no different from Egyptian Muslims. Their language and culture are part of the greater fabric of Egyptian history and culture, and it is imperative that the Egyptian government treats it as so, instead of allowing the Coptic

community to isolate itself. This investment into Coptic linguistic and cultural heritage would benefit all Egyptians regardless of faith and would ease sectarian tensions by letting all Egyptians participate in preserving their rich heritage. Though Copts are discriminated against based on faith rather than for their status as a pseudo-linguistic minority, the Coptic language is wholly dependent on the Coptic Christian faith, as it is now a liturgical language that is scarcely used outside of religious settings. The Coptic language not only connects Copts to their faith, but connects all Egyptians to their shared past, as it is the last phase of the ancient Egyptian language and provides incredible anthropological insight to ancient Egyptian language, culture, and history. In elevating Copts to equal status with their Muslim neighbors, the Egyptian state would be able to assist Copts in not only thriving after decades of persecution but also in maintaining the preservation of the Coptic language

V. Syrian and Iraqi Christians: A Case Study

The Christians of Iraq and Syria, though not as strong in number as Copts, have nonetheless played important roles in their respective societies. The Christians within these two modern-day nation states are far from monolithic, they hail from varying sects of Christianity, ethnic groups, and linguistic groups. I will focus primarily on Aramaic-speaking Assyrians in Iraq and Syria such as Assyrians/Syriacs and Chaldeans, as well as Arabic-speaking Christians in Syria as the former are the second largest non-Arab ethnolinguistic group in Iraq and Syria (second to the Kurds who I will discuss in a separate case study), and the latter are a group that illustrate what assimilation entails for Christians in the two nations.

Christians, particularly Aramaic-speaking Christians have experienced cycles of both stability and suppression within Iraq and Syria since the Islamization and Arabization of much of the land throughout the early Islamic conquests. Under the Rashidun, Umayyad, and Abbasid caliphates, as well as during most of the reign of the Ottoman Empire, those who did

not convert to Islam maintained a degree of autonomy under the condition that they pay the Islamic *jizya* tax to secure protection and autonomy as well as an exemption from military service. This protection, of course, came with certain caveats, such as the prohibition of building new churches or converting Muslims to Christianity, but apart from this, Christians in Islamic lands were granted a degree of freedom and protections as *dhimmi* or people of the book. The imposition of the *jizya* tax, depending on the administration, occasionally "led to abuse… various Muslim traditions disapprovingly described non-Muslims being required to stand in the sun or even having oil poured on their heads while standing in the sun on account of not being able to pay the *jizya*" (Tannous 2018, 325). This violent imposition of the *jizya*, looked down upon by most Muslims and perpetuated by corrupt local tax collectors, led many poor Christians to look towards conversion as a way out (Tannous 2018, 327). The *jizya* poll as a pipeline to conversion was also an occasional occurrence among poor Christians of the Ottomans Empire. *jizya*, depending on those implementing the policy, either resulted in minority faiths obtaining a degree of self-governance and autonomy or persecution to the point of conversion.

Christians in both Syria and Iraq frequently recorded their first interactions with Arabs. Though the works of the region's Christians that were written in Greek have been more widely studied and interpreted, the largest collection of texts about initial interactions with Arabs were written in Aramaic/Syriac, as observed by Michael Phillip Penn in his analysis of early Syriac writings about Arabs. It was not until under Umayyad Caliph Abd al-Malik that the linguistic shift from Aramaic/Syriac to Arabic accelerated in Syria, Iraq, and the Levant. Penn explains that 'Abd al-Malik "changed the language of governance, replacing a variety of local languages-such as Coptic, Greek Persian, and Syriac-with an Arabophone administration. This helped begin a centuries-long process that eventually reduced Syriac from a lingua franca to a primarily liturgical language" (Penn 2015, 13).

Syria was a majority Christian territory when Islam was first introduced. The conversion of Syrian Christians to Islam happened under much different circumstances that the conversion of Egypt's Coptic Christians, which Stephen Humphreys characterizes as a "mixed bag of broad tolerance and incidents of oppression, of enduring (even prospering) Christian communities alongside Muslim settlement and conversion to Islam" (Humphreys 2010, 328). In Greater Syria (now Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine), if monasteries and church hierarchy could continue to reap revenue from their lands as well as maintain steady donations from wealthy Christian families, Christians could thrive and maintain their system of church financing. After the Arab-Muslim conquests wealthy Christians became the sole source of funding for the church, however, no longer able to obtain their wealth through the imperial Byzantine bureaucracy and saved their wealth by working for the new Islamic government. As a result, Stephen Humphreys explains, more wealthy Christians adopted Islam, leaving the Christian communities and churches that relied on them behind:

> As the scions of notable Christian families adopted Islam, they would take their wealth and prestige with them, and in this way the economic and social foundations of Christian life would crumble bit by bit. Moreover, the conversion of elite Christian life would undermine the morale of villagers and ordinary townspeople and their commitment to the old religion, not to mention their willingness to bear up under the fiscal disabilities and social marginalization increasingly imposed by Islamic regimes. (Humphreys 2010, 329).

Under Ottoman rule, the millet system, defined by Harvard as "the Ottoman administration of separate religious communities that acknowledged each community's authority in overseeing its own communal affairs, primarily through independent religious

court systems and schools," (Harvard 2021) allowed religious minorities not only to practice their faiths, but to maintain their own languages. This peace, however, was violently disrupted towards the end of the Ottoman empire during the Ottoman scramble to assert its Turkishness in the emerging nationalist climate that followed the empire's humiliation after World War I. Though Christians throughout the Ottoman empire experienced economic hardship in the last few decades of Ottoman rule and began migrating out of the region, 1915 marks the empire's official assault on the populations it had once protected. This year is infamous not only for the Armenian genocide but for a genocide of Assyrians as well. At the same time, Christians, both Arab and non-Arab, fled the region in increased numbers and assimilated into foreign lands, primarily the Americas. Many become displaced within the region as well, with many Assyrians and Kurds fleeing outside what would become the emerging Turkish nation-state's borders, and Armenians retreating to the east to what is now the Armenian nation-state. The mass migration of Christians from this region, especially non-Arab Christians, had a detrimental impact on Aramaic usage. Later, as both Turkish nationalism and Arab nationalism emerged from the post-colonial world order, minority languages in the region became threatened even further. The era of the millet system and all its benefits was no more.

Though the millet system slowed down Arabization among religious minorities, some minority groups had already Arabized before Ottoman rule while still maintaining their religious identity. We see this in many modern-day Syrian Christians, particularly those in non-Assyrian churches such as the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch or the Melkite Catholic Church. Though their ancestors once spoke Aramaic or Greek, these groups had Arabized both culturally and linguistically. Assyrians in Syria, however, maintained their linguistic heritage, and are often more reluctant to identify as "Arab Christians".

In modern Syria, Christians were not known to have faced many systematic hurdles

from the Syrian government. Though lacking in political representation, Syrian Christians are extremely well-educated, and many in rural areas still own the same lands that their parents and grandparents owned. Prior to the outbreak of the Syrian war, Syrian Christians, both Arabs and non-Arabs, were relatively well-adjusted compared to other minority groups in the region. 2011 and the Syrian revolution, however, resulted in a dramatic decline of this prosperity.

Terrified of the threat of Islamic extremism, Syrian Christians as well as most of the 9 patriarchs that oversee various Christian communities, clung to the Assad regime, which promised to protect them. The Syrian government, run by the Assads since 1971, is made up of remnants of Arab nationalism and Ba'athism. Regardless of their policies on language preservation, Many Syrian Christians relied on the government for protection as a means of survival. The government fueled paranoia among Christians to win their support even having, as Omar Oehring reports "referred to the plight of Coptic Christians in Egypt and Christians in Iraq in order to fuel fears among the Syrian Christians of what might happen if the opposition were successful" (Oehring 2017, 10). Much like the Syrian government, Ba'athist Iraq, particularly under the regime of Saddam Hussein, used its suppression of extremist groups as a bargaining chip to pressure Christians into giving them their support. Unlike the Syrian Christians, however, Assyrian Christians in Iraq were not so easily won over. Their non-Arab identity was frequently targeted by the regime. Assyrians who served in the government often changed their names and identified themselves as Arabs as a desperate attempt to avoid discrimination. This discrimination was not new to Assyrians; as 50,000 Assyrians fled to modern day Iraq from southeastern Turkey during the Armenian and Assyrians genocides (Lewis 2003, 49-57), while the remainder of Assyrians in Turkey were forced to assimilate. The dire circumstances Assyrians in Iraq frequently found themselves in resulted in an Assyrian nationalist movement. However, as Jonathan Eric Lewis points out,

Assyrians had little international allies flocking towards their cause. Lewis argues that "[u]nlike the Jews, they had no great power patron or an equivalent of the Balfour Declaration. After the postwar settlement, Assyrians found themselves once again a small, vulnerable minority in the modern states of Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey" (Lewis 2003, 49-57).

The ethnic discrimination Assyrians in Iraq faced under Baathism, and the leadership of Saddam Hussein only strengthened their demands of autonomy. The Baathist regime, to enforce Arabism and homogeneity, banned the use of the Aramaic/Syriac language, excluded Assyrian ethnicity from census forms, nationalized schools ran by Christian churches, and pressured Assyrians to identify as "Arab Christians", punishing any sign of Assyrian nationalism. Baathist Iraq used the education system as a primary tool of Arabizing Assyrian children, and frequently threatened Assyrian land ownership. The fighting between the Iraqi government and Kurds in Northern Iraq, where many Assyrians were concentrated, resulted in the demolition of hundreds of Assyrians villages and towns in the 70s. Still, Assyrians flourished in Kurdish regions in comparison to Assyrian populations under the direct jurisdiction of the Baathist regime. By 2003, around half (Lewis 2003, 49-57) of the Assyrians in Iraq had fled the country, adding to the already growing diasporas across the globe. This emigration was fueled even further after the U.S. invasion of 2003, when extremist groups such as Al-Qaeda openly attacked Assyrian churches and subjected them to harsh persecution. Christians began to flee North to Kurdistan, as the events following the U.S. invasion affected the small Assyrian community that remained in Iraq after decades of suppression by the Baathist regime and had devastating effects on Aramaic usage in the country. A similar circumstance befell upon Assyrians in Syria, many of whom lived in Syria's northeast, which was taken over by ISIS in 2015, as most of the residents of the 35 villages that Assyrians once lived in had left Syria altogether (Oehring 2017, 9). While pre-

war Syrian Christians, both Arab and Assyrian alike, enjoyed equal rights in terms of education, land, and social recognition, Iraqi Assyrians under the Hussein regime raced intense discrimination based on their ethnic identity, and were only awarded equal protections or political representation assuming they assimilated. As a result, Syrian Christians, protected by their government, did not form an extensive resistance such as Iraqi Assyrian Christians, who have formed a solid resistance and autonomous movement. Though neither suffered direct religious discrimination from either the Syrian or Iraqi governments, the onset of conflict made both countries ripe for the infiltration of radical extremist groups who violently and constantly made Christians of all ethnic background's targets of severe persecution.

After the century-long assault that various nationalist regimes and deadly conflicts have had on Assyrians and the Aramaic language, Assyrians in the diaspora have established a variety of cultural and linguistic institutions to preserve their cultural, linguistic, religious, and ethnic heritage. Some argue that the diaspora's preservation efforts are enough to sustain the Assyrian community's sense of identity. Emma Loosely writes in agreement with this idea, claiming that:

> [w]ithout a comprehensive plan to focus on community education, spiritual renewal will become increasingly difficult in Syria itself and the community will have to start looking at the diaspora to lead in these matters...unless those remaining in Syria re-evaluate their opinions on culture – which is currently placed low on their list of priorities – in another couple of generations it will only be the diaspora community that possesses the knowledge to keep ancient traditions alive. (Loosley 2009, 243)

While perhaps preserving the link many in the diaspora have to their identity and their

traditions, Loosely's prescriptions will not preserve the Aramaic language itself. Preserving this ancient language means that Assyrians, and other Aramaic-speaking Christians, in Iraq and Syria, can freely speak their language without restriction from their governments and with protection. As we have seen in Iraq, a state physically protecting Aramaic speaking Christians is not sufficient to ensure the survival of their language, since this protection comes at the price of suppression and assimilation into Arab identity. Eden Naby comes to a much different conclusion than Loosley in her study of Aramaic speaking peoples such as the Assyrians, arguing that "Despite its best efforts, the Aramaic speaking diaspora cannot maintain the language without a base where literacy, popular cultural production, teachers, writers, poets and cultural activities may be nurtured. This base can only exist in Iraq (or in this context, in the various nation-states in which Assyrians are indigenous to)" (Naby 2004, 202). When it comes to Christians in Syria and Iraq, particularly Aramaic-speaking Christians, Naby goes beyond Loosley's support for Assyrian diaspora and their preservation efforts, and argues that "enlightened public language policy, coupled with respect for the rights of non-conforming ethnic groups, and international pressure may be the determining factors in whether Aramaic will disappear in this century" (Naby 2004, 197).

The aggressive, Arab-nationalist-oriented attempt of social control by the Iraqi government over the decades have only fueled resistance movements in Assyrian communities, which is turn, in the eyes of the government, legitimized their approach to attaining the social control they desired. In taking the wrong approach to social control and as a result not ultimately succeeding at it, the Baathist regime proved itself to be a weak state that was swiftly toppled. Even after the ousting of Saddam Hussein and his government, the Assyrians left in Iraq after decades of discrimination and then conflict continue to face countless hardships. As for Syrian Christians, their principal hardships are dealing with the aftermath of a decade-long war that undoubtedly wreaked havoc on them physically and

economically.

VI. Kurds: A Case Study

Kurds have, without a doubt, been one of the most visible "minority" groups in the Southwest Asia and North Africa region. I use the word "minority" very loosely. Collectively, they are a large ethnolinguistic group numbering between 35 to 45 million, and one of the largest stateless ethnic groups in the world. However, after the carving out of borders in the region, Kurds found themselves split into several new nation-states. When I describe them as a "minority" group, I mean within the context of their existence scattered across several states in the region such as Syria, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and the Caucasus. Within these nations they are often regarded as minorities, but collectively they are a distinct group that, like many ethnic groups during the colonial era, were denied their own nation-state. This is a fact often brought up by Kurdish nationalists, who, as Michael Rubin explains, "complain that the Great Powers undercut Kurdish unity by dividing Kurdistan. Had it not been for the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and the treaties of Sèvres and Lausanne, the argument goes, then the Kurds might have realized their dream for a united and independent homeland" (Rubin 2003, 298).

After being thrust into the limelight after the onset of the Iraq War, and later the Syrian War, the question of Kurdish autonomy has gained even more traction. As an ethnolinguistic group that has historically occupied the highlands and plains of southern Anatolia and northern Syria and Iraq (which I will simply refer to as Kurdistan), they have been more successful in avoiding total assimilation into the countries that encompass their land. There is an exception with many Kurds moving to industrialized cities in Turkey and joining high ranks of government and society, but this was almost always under the expectation that they would first assimilate into broader culture. Despite their general concentration in lands far

from industrialized cities and geopolitical centers, they still have been consistent targets of nationalistic policies aimed at assimilating ethnolinguistic minorities.

The land I will collectively refer to as Kurdistan is about 500,000 kilometers (Rubin, 295), however only Kurdish territories in Iran and Iraq are officially referred to as such, and even Iraqi and Iranian 'Kurdistan' fail to fully span across both country's Kurdish territories. The borders of Kurdish provinces are often arbitrary and heavily contested. Michael Rubin expands on this, pointing out that only one-eighth of Kurdish inhabited land in Iran is officially a part of the country's Kurdistan Province, and that in Iraq, "the 1974 autonomy law defined Kurdistan as areas found by the 1957 census to have a Kurdish majority, meaning the governorates of Dohuk, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah. However, Kurds have long disputed the census, and make additional claims on both the city and governorate of Kirkuk" (Rubin 2003, 296).

Though hopes for a national homeland were inflamed by the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres, which proposed Kurdish autonomy in northern Iraq and Southern Turkey, these hopes were swiftly crushed when Mustafa Kemal Ataturk refused to concede any part of Anatolia to Europe during the negotiations for the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. Just two years later in 1925, The League of Nations addressed the Kurdish problem in newly formed Iraq: "the League of Nations awarded the province (of Mosul) to Iraqi control, albeit on three conditions: that the largely Kurdish province remain under League mandate for 25 years; that Kurdish would be the official language of the region; and that Kurds would in practice administer the province" (Rubin 2003, 300). These conditions, however, were not met, as both the monarchy of Iraq (1921-1958) and the Iraqi republic (1959-1968) often conflicted with Kurds, a conflict was intensified tremendously under the Ba'ath government under Saddam Hussein, who carried out full on massacres and ethnic cleansing against both Kurds and Assyrians.

Iraq

Iraq is home to 5.5 million Kurds today. Like other nationalist regimes in the region, Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath government disapproved of ethnic pluralism. Hussein's Arab nationalist policies favored ethnic Arabs and placed institutional and economic burdens on non-Arab ethnic groups to pressure them to Arabize. Arabization efforts were reflected in both school curriculums in which Kurdish language and culture was forbidden, as well as the confiscation of Kurdish lands and the state effort to replace them with Arabs. As Muslims, Kurds did not face much religious discrimination from the Iraqi state and did not have any particular issues regarding their religious institutions and the government. Kurdish media was heavily regulated and monitored in Baathist Iraq, and Kurds had almost no social or cultural recognition from the state. In addition to institutional and economic discrimination, the Ba'ath government carried out brutal ethnic cleansing campaign, even within the Kurdish lands that Iraq had agreed to grant a degree of self-rule back in 1923. These ethnic cleansing campaigns were in part driven by Iraq's desire to control Kirkuk, the cultural center of Iraqi Kurdistan and the epicenter of Iraq's oil industry. Because of the indispensable value of Kirkuk's oil industry, the city became a priority of Saddam's Arabization efforts, implementing the ethnic cleansing of Kurds from Kirkuk and replacing them with Arabs. This period, following the unfruitful autonomy accords in 1970 and 1974, was followed by the razing of over 1,400 Kurdish villages and the ethnic cleansing of 600,000 Kurds (Rubin 2003. 301). The 1980's saw the continuation of this ethnic cleansing, with the razing of 200 Kurdish villages and displacement of 55,00 Kurds in 1985, the destruction of 4,000 of 4,655 Kurdish villages in Iraqi Kurdistan and the execution of 182,000 Kurds in 1988. States paid no mind to Kurdish land rights and justified the theft of their land by villainizing Kurds as a threat to state autonomy.

Feeling betrayed by international allies that failed to defend Kurdistan, Kurds took

control in the enforcement of their "safe zone" and proved themselves as talented state-builders despite the lack of foreign assistance. They held democratic elections in 1992, representing multiple parties in their national assembly including 5 seats for Assyrian Christians, many of whom fled to Kurdistan as they faced immense discrimination under the Iraqi Ba'ath government. The Kurdish Regional Government or KRG made strides in improving infrastructure, having "reconstructed 2,600 of the 4,000 villages destroyed in the Anfal campaign… In the Dohuk and Erbil governorate alone the Kurdish administration has built over the last five years (as of 2001) 410 new schools, 145 health clinics, 3,600 kilometers of new roads, and 90 kilometers of new sewers. The stability and prosperity maintained by the KRG in Kurdistan came to an abrupt halt in 2014 when the Islamic State (IS or ISIS) emerged from the instability caused by the Iraq war and Syrian war. Kurdish YPG guerillas, backed by the PKK, as well as Syrian Kurdish militias, resisted ISIS in every way possible, with or without the help of international forces such as the U.S. The KRG made fighting ISIS its priority, putting any plans of independence on an indefinite hold.

Turkey

The late hyper-nationalist fever during the final days of the Ottoman empire manifested itself in Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who following the Ottoman defeat in World War I, led the Turkish National Movement and went on to become the first president of the Republic of Turkey after the empire fell apart. He was a rigid secularist and Turkish nationalist, enacting industrial, educational, and cultural reforms to modernize Turkey and emulate the West. A key factor in his reforms was Turkification. His vision for a united and homogenous Turkey undoubtedly had negative effects on the many minority groups within the borders of the new Turkish state. Kurds, Assyrians, and Armenians, or at least those that were left following the late Ottoman genocides, faced tremendous pressure to speak the Turkish language, bestow on their children Turkish names, and assimilate into Turkish culture.

Kemalism, the ideology that became the driving force of the new Turkish Republic, though successful in modernizing the country in many aspects, set a detrimental precedent for the Turkish state in how it deals with minority groups. Kemalism/Turkish nationalism essentially replaced Ottomanism and rewrote its history in national mythology: "according to the new Kemalist Ottoman historiography, there had not been a Turkish nation, but a Muslim community whose members had to be unconditionally faithful to the Sultanate, and the non-Turkish character of the Ottoman Empire brought about the failure of the Turks in their leadership of civilization" (Colak, 590). Islam was no longer the glue that held Anatolia together, as the Kemalists stressed Turkishness as the glue for national unity. This undoubtedly stirred up quite a few issues regarding the state's relationship with Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks in the nation, as well as, most infamously, 14.7 million Kurds, who now became a part of the "other" despite centuries of Islamic unity.

The election of the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi or AKP) turned the corner in the state of relations between minorities and the Turkish state. The AKP was more embracing of Ottoman history, which generally stressed religious unity of ethnic unity. This allowed the AKP to soften the state's Kurdish policies, lifting the many restrictions Kurds faced under Kemalism including the criminalization of their language. Despite the AKP's efforts, it is evident that the late Ottoman genocides and ethnic chauvinism of Kemalist Turkey had left a severe mark on the country. This is most evident in the existence of the Kurdistan Workers Party or PKK, a militant Kurdish nationalist group with sizable power among varying Kurdish lands in the region and in the diaspora. The PKK is a symbol of the distrust and animosity many Kurds, and minorities have towards the Turkish state because of its history. Even after loosening Kurdish language restriction in 2009 and softening government ties with Kurdish regions, the Turkish government following the failed 2016 coup cracked down on Kurdish majority regions as an effort to punish any sign of

opposition. Aside from military aggression against Kurds, the government also cracked down on Kurdish teachers and elected officials and regional administrators, and Kurdish media, reminiscent of anti-Kurdish policies present throughout much of the 20th century.

In Turkey, Kurds faced tremendous institutional discrimination, especially after the establishment of Kemalism as the official state ideology. The various educational policies of Kemalist Turkey, as well as the social, economic, and institutional reforms, left many minorities out because of this new emphasis on Turkishness. Pluralism was no longer respected, a phenomenon that began in the growing nationalist policy in the late Ottoman empire that eventually reigned over Ottomanism. Islamic unity was irrelevant in Kemalist Turkey, as the Kemalists emphasized secular ethno-nationalism above all. Overall, "the Turkish reformers' main intention was to end the Ottoman multicultural and multinational legacy by melding all differences under the name of Turk" (Colak 2006, 591). Though some groups from minorities within Turkey migrated to large cities, assimilated, and rose to high ranks of the Turkish government, those who stayed in their ethnic homelands eventually developed a more fervent desire for their own nationalism and separatism, fueled by the various policies enacted by Kemalist reforms that left them feeling marginalized and pressured to assimilate. This included crackdowns on the Kurdish language as an effort to distance Kurds from their identity; Ofra Bengio describes these crackdowns:

> So threatened was the Turkish political elite by the Kurdish language that over the years they employed a whole gamut of linguicide policies, including bans on Kurdish names, on both written and spoken Kurdish, and on the Kurdish alphabet.37 The letters Q, W, and X were explicitly banned, as they do not exist in the Turkish alphabet. The most direct affront to freedom of speech was the notorious Law 2932, which came into effect as late as 1983 and banned the use of the Kurdish language in either public or private

spheres. The very word "Kurd" was not to be used in the media. (Benigo 2017, 24)

From 1983 until 1991, the public use of the Kurdish language was illegal. Restrictions were placed on Kurdish music and broadcasting as well as a near ban on Kurdish language institutions in Turkey. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan loosened many Kurdish language restrictions in 2009, but since the failed coup against the president in 2016, the Turkish government cracked down on all opposition, especially Kurdish opposition. This turned into a witch hunt, targeting anyone remotely close to being affiliated with opposition groups such as the PKK, including the suspension of 10,000 Kurdish teachers, the censoring of Kurdish language media outlets, the arrests of Kurdish elected leaders, and even the enforcement of curfews and restricted internet access in Kurdish regions.

Though the secular Turkish nationalist ideology withered away with the election of the more conservative Islamist Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) into power in 2002, Kemalist legacy and anti-pluralism still linger within Turkish politics, even within the current conservative-leaning government. Though the AKP pushes for a heavier tolerance for Islam within the limits of democracy, this isn't ensuring the smooth sailing of reconciliation efforts between the state and Kurds, or other ethno-linguistic minorities, particularly after the near century of Kurdish nationalism and its often-violent relationship with the Turkish state. The AKP, though insistent on finding a solution to the "Kurdish problem", undoubtedly finds it hard to do so as Kemalism had left such a profound mark. Minority resistance, particularly minority militant groups such as the Kurdistan Workers Party or PKK are living legacies of resistance to late Ottoman and then Kemalist anti-pluralist ideology and reflect how the actions of the state directly fuel whether a minority group is bound to form a resistance or not.

Syria

Syria's Kurds, numbering today at 1.7 million, much like those in Iraq and Turkey, have also historically suffered the effects of nationalism. During the French mandate, Kurds were "enlisted by French authorities, creating dependency in regard to the administrative machine" (Tejel 2009, 5). The French mandate system, more so than other European imperial powers administering the region, often was responsible for deepening rifts between ethnic or religious groups in Syria and Lebanon, and "were important agents in defining local ethnic and religious groups as minorities and in creating modern nation-states, namely Syria" (Tejel 2009, 8). This relationship between France and "minority" groups such as the Kurds left a legacy of divisiveness in Syria and Lebanon long after independence from France in 1946.

Arab nationalism, after over a decade of political instability in the nation, became the official state ideology in Syria, which was crystalized in Syria's union with Egypt in the short-lived United Arab Republic (1958-1961). It was under the UAR where Arabism took full effect and instituted the state-sanctioned suppression of Kurdish regional autonomy, culture, and language. The UAR implemented repressive policies towards ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities, Kurds being no exception. In a study of Syria's Kurds, Jordi Tejel explains that "among these minorities, the Kurds had two "faults" in the eyes of the authorities, First, they were a non-Arab "minority" and, thus, a threat to plans for Arab unity, and second, they were associated with the "feudal chiefs" and the world of the "notables" which the authorities wished to eliminate" (Tejel 2009, 48). Under the UAR, Tejel explains,

> Recordings of Kurdish music were smashed in cafes. The publication and even the possession of books written in Kurdish language were offenses punishable by imprisonment. Egyptian teachers were sent into Kurdish regions, Local tragedies fanned the fires of discontent in Northern Syria. For instance, although the facts were

> never established, the authorities were accused in November of 1960 by the inhabitants of Amunda of causing a fire in a movie house that caused the death of 283 Kurdish children. Those responsible for this act were presumably motivated by anti-Kurdish sentiments, the fruits of official propaganda in opposition to Kurdish nationalism associated with Zionism and American imperialism (Tejel 2009, 48).

Upon the seizure of power by the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party in 1963 (which are still in power to this day), repressive policies towards the Kurds continued. Though Ba'athists rejected the form of pan-Arabism that the UAR and Nasserists had hoped to achieve, they were staunch Arab nationalists. The Ba'athist government took over a dozen different measures to suppress Kurds, whose very existence they believed threatened their Arab nationalist cause. These measures, as Tejel describes, included

> (1) the displacement of Kurds from their lands to the interior; (2) the denial of education; (3) the handing over of "wanted" Kurds to Turkey; (4) the denial of employment possibilities; (5) an anti-Kurdish propaganda campaign; (6) deportation of Kurdish religious '*ulama* (clerics) who would be replaced by Arabs; (7) the implementation of a "divide-and-rule" policy against the Kurds; (8) the colonization of Kurdish lands by Arabs; (9) the militarization of the "northern Arab belt" and the deportation of Kurds from this area; (10) the creation of "collective farms" for the new Arab settlers; (11) the denial of the right to vote or hold office to anyone lacking knowledge of Arabic; and (12) the denial of citizenship to any non-Arab wishing to live in the area (Tejel 2009, 61).

Ba'athists were insistent on creating an "Arab belt," a 280 km area of arable land along

the northern border with Turkey. This band of land would be 10 to 15 km wide, spanning from the city of Ras al- ‘Ayn in the west, to the Iraqi border: “the plan anticipated the massive deportation of 140,000 Kurds, most of whom had been deprived of their Syrian citizenship in 1962 and who were living in 332 villages situated inside this band. They would be replaced by Arabs. The objective, according to the Arab press, was to “save Arabism in Jazira” (Tejel 2009, 61).

This mass deportation was, essentially, ethnic cleansing. A policy we have seen go hand in hand with the deprival of civil liberties and linguistic repression. Like Iraq and Turkey, attacks on the Kurdish language were an instrumental policy towards the goal of Kurdish identity erasure. The government banned all mention of the Kurds from school textbooks in 1967 and forced Kurdish children to take Arabic classes in the hopes of Arabizing them. Additionally, Kurdish parents were pressured to avoid registering Kurdish names for their children in the birth registry and register Arabic names instead.

Anti-Kurdish policies continued into the presidency of Hafiz al-As’ad, who, as Tejel argues, was also incredibly hostile towards Kurdish identity, namely the Kurdish language. Though other ethnolinguistic minorities, such as Assyrians, were tolerated by the Syrian state (a stark contrast to how Ba’athist Iraq treated Assyrians), Kurds were too large in number and too organized for the states liking. This, in the eyes of the Syrian government, made them more difficult to control than these other ethno-linguistic minorities within Syria, who were typically smaller in number and more reliant on the state. Syria, much like Iraq and Turkey, maintained repressive policies towards Kurds and their language. Tejel goes on to describe these policies:

> The teaching of this language remained prohibited, while Armenians and Assyrians had private schools, clubs, and cultural associations where their respective languages

> could be taught. During the 1970s, public schools became for the Kurds not only a place of Ba'athist indoctrination, as it was for other Syrians, but also a place of Arabization. With the increase in literate children in the Kurdish regions, a tight surveillance system was established there. Following the example of the Turks, by means of "spies," to stop the children from speaking Kurdish amongst themselves (Tejel 2009, 63).

The 1980s saw the passing of decrees that banned the Kurdish language in the workplace as well as at marriage ceremonies and festivals, followed by new decrees in 2000 that closed stores that sold any type of Kurdish language media. Due to the Syrian government's historic hostility towards the Kurds, it comes as no surprise that the Kurds joined in on anti-government sentiment during the onset of the Syrian revolution. When government forces retreated from Kurdish regions to focus on more dire threats, Kurds took on the responsibility of fighting the Islamic state in their region and preventing Turkish encroachment on the northern border. According to the international crisis group,

> The Syrian conflict has exacerbated the undeclared fight for the heart and soul of the Kurdish national movement in the four countries (Syria, Iraq, Turkey, and Iran) across which it is divided. The PYD's and KNC's respective regional patrons, the PKK and Barzani's KDP, represent the two predominant models of Kurdish nationalism today as well as two competing paradigms for dealing with Turkey, whose territory encompasses much of what Kurds see as their historic homeland. The PKK has used an episodic armed struggle to try to force Ankara to extend greater cultural and political rights to Kurds in Turkey; in contrast, the KDP, using its dominance of the Kurdistan Regional Government, has labored hard in recent years to develop economic interdependence and

political ties to coax Turkey into a more constructive posture and simultaneously reduce the KRG's dependence on Baghdad ("Syria's Kurds: A Struggle within a Struggle." 2013).

Despite decades of oppression, Kurds still maintain strong modes of organization, and have been passionate participants in political activism as well as militaristic organization. The Syrian war has given Kurds the opportunity to take a more valiant approach to their own autonomy, but tensions with non-Kurdish opposition groups and internal divisions hinder their progression.

Kurds and the Future

Overall, Kurds are an exceptional case study in that they are perhaps the only group I have focused on that have 1) have not seen a significant effort from their respective states in meeting their basic rights and fulfilling some degree of cultural and linguistic protection efforts (or at the very least, recognition) and b) continue to maintain strong political and armed organizational efforts that still conflict with the states they reside in. Out of the groups I have reviewed so far, Kurds are the only ones that may have no choice but regional autonomy. For nearly a century, most Kurds refused to assimilate into their respective states, aided in part by their concentration in specific regions, and these states refused to integrate Kurds into their national systems without the requirement that they essentially give up their identity. Joel Midgal mentions the unique position of the Kurds and argues that

> In fact, resistance to state designs by unassimilating minorities or vulnerable peasants and workers clinging for security to tried and true folkways has often been quite significant. Some groups have viewed an expansion of state capabilities with grave suspicion, as a process presaging dire threats to their income, their autonomy, even their

> lives. The Kurds in Iraq, Iran, and Turkey, for example, have stood as witnesses during the last generation to the determination of some groups to stop the state from doing what many others assume to be the state's unquestionable duty (Migdal 1998, 14).

This 'unquestionable duty' alludes to centralized social control, a part of Migdal's state-society relations model that is described as essential for the strengthening of the state's power. Kurdish resistance has been a massive hurdle to the goal of centralized social control in Syria, Iran, Turkey, and Iraq, thereby "weakening" these states according to this model. This can explain why states fear minority rights and regard them as a threat to state power rather than a tool for transformative change. The ideas of a strong state and minority rights being mutually exclusive is yet another remnant of European imperial rule, which even after its end, set an example among new nation states that state power demands a centralized, and even homogenized society. This old European state-society model, often emulated by countries in the global south (including the SWANA region) is clearly insufficient for today's world in which minorities such as the Kurds continually refuse to mobilize on behalf of their state after the post-colonial era. With the existence of state-recognized Kurdish autonomous regions in Iraq and Iran, as well as the new informal Kurdish autonomous zone in Syria, it seems that states have slowly backed down in their effort to establish social control over Kurdish lands, recognizing that despite their decades of efforts to integrate Kurds into a "pyramid-like" distribution of social control, many Kurds are unwilling to mobilize on behalf of a state that refuses to even acknowledge their identity. As proven by Migdal's model, this Kurdish resistance, if anything is not despite these states attempts to establish social control over Kurds, but because of it, as these states attempted to form social control not through strongmen and the creation of institutions and organizations, but through physical force and identity erasure.

To visualize the variables that affect the relationship between Kurds and the states in which they live, the table below illustrates the current state of state policy in certain areas that we have seen states focus on in terms of minority policies across these case studies. This table shows a clear pattern of negative policies aimed at social control, which only fuel resistance. In the Kurds case, attempts of social control by states have been so violent that their autonomous movement remains the strongest in the region.

This table assesses state policies of social control on the basis on whether it was positive or negative, positive meaning Kurds were integrated into the state's reach by policies that did not threaten their rights or ask them to assimilate in exchange, and negative indicating that the state attempted social control through violence and identity erasure rather than the establishment of government organizations and strongmen.

Table 1: State Policy Regarding Kurds

State Policy	*Iraq*	*Turkey*	*Syria*	*Iran*
Education	-	-	-	-
Land Rights	±	-	o	-
Political Participation	±	±	-	-
Social Policy	±	-	-	o
Religious Rights	o	o	o	-
Current state of resistance	Official autonomous zone	Autonomous movement	Unofficial autonomous zone	Kurdish region; ongoing push for autonomy

Key:

+ positive policies of social control (-) negative policies of social control (o) no policy

(±) positive policies only within autonomous zone (±) positive policy with the expectation of assimilation

Kurds, with few official international alliances, have had to largely rely on themselves to meet their basic needs. They are by no means meek and have fought for their rights on every level. Iraq's Kurds have proven to be both responsible state-builders within their autonomous zone, even successfully defending it from the Islamic State. Iran and Syria's continued anti-Kurdish policies, as well as Turkey's relapse into the same following the failed coup in 2016, have discouraged many Kurds from the possibility of coexisting peacefully with their states. Many Kurdish groups throughout the region have resorted to violent separatism, while many continue their political and social activism and look to Iraqi Kurdish autonomy as their example. Given the history of anti-Kurdish policies throughout this region, autonomy, like that of Kurds in Iraq, may be the only route to ensuring the protection of the Kurdish language. Kurdish hopes for autonomy, however, remain at the mercy of the states they live in, and the larger geopolitical context of great power relations

VII. Amazigh, A Case Study

The Amazigh, much like Kurds, are large in number, but are spread across multiple modern-day nation states. Also like the Kurds, Amazigh/Imazighen, or as they used to be referred to, Berbers, faced marginalization in many realms of North African society, particularly institutional erasure of their language and heritage. Unlike the Kurds, however, the tide has turned tremendously in terms of Amazigh language rights in the in the past few decades across North Africa. Additionally, Amazigh are not a totally secluded ethnic minority, as many aspects of culture and cuisine characterize North African societies. Though Amazigh nationalism had grown in the post-colonial era, the advancements made in Amazigh rights and language preservation raises the question if these policies set sufficient precedent for North African governments to fully include the Imazighen into their societies to

the extent that the Imazighen are content with being a part of these states. Or, perhaps, is nationalism still a prominent desire among the Amazigh regardless of these advancements?

Indigenous to Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, and to smaller communities in Mauritania, Niger, and Mali, Imazighen people number up to 30 million, as many as 20 million being Moroccan Imazighen (Handaine 2021). According to language scholar Mohammed Errihani,

> The word Berber derives from the Greek word *Barbaroi* (barbarian), a name that was used to refer to anyone who was a foreigner or did not speak Greek. The Amazigh people (the Berbers) prefer to be referred to as Amazigh (plural: Imazighen), a word that means free and noble, and their language is Tamazight, rather than Berber, which also refers to one of the three varieties of this language spoken in Morocco (Tarifit in the Rif Mountains, Tashelhit in the High Atlas and the South, and Tamazight in the Middle Atlas region) (Errihani 2006, 153).

Like many other ethno-linguistic minorities in the region, Arabization efforts following the colonial era threatened the Imazighen language and thus their sense of identity. Amazigh identity is closely intertwined with the Tamazight language. Centuries of coexistence between Arabs and Imazighen, argues Abderrahman el Assiati, caused various Amazigh cuisine, dress, and customs to have "shaped the culture of North-Africa" (Assiati 2001, 59). Additionally, Most Moroccan Arabs are of Amazigh ancestry, a fact that contributed to the implementation of Tamazight instruction in primary schools. Mohammed Errihani makes the point that

> The official rationale behind such a fundamentally political act is to remind all

> Moroccans, Arabs and Imazighen, that Tamazight is not the property of the Amazigh people only; it is rather the heritage of all Moroccans who are now called upon to cherish and value this legacy as part of their Moroccan identity. Language has, therefore, become the defining characteristic and the core value of the Imazighen upon which they aim to revive their cultural identity. As such, the most obvious means for the revival and maintenance of Tamazight has become the elaboration of an educational program intended to teach this threatened language to all members of the Moroccan community (Errihani 2006, 143).

Though many aspects of Amazigh culture remain exclusive to the Imazaghen themselves, this overlap in culture left much of the burden of being an Amazigh identity marker on the Tamazight language itself. Ceasing to speak the Tamazight language threatens one very identity as an Amazigh, since, according to Assiati, "the most prominent index to ethnicity is linguistic" (Assiati 2001, 59). The threat to the Tamazight language was accelerated by technology and mass media, industrialization, and public schooling, all of which attracted Imazighen to dominantly- Arabic speaking cities, institutions, and media. Prior to this, as Moha Ennaji explains, "many Berbers adopted Islam and Arabic, the process of "Arabization" that began with the Arab conquest of North Africa in the seventh century and spiraled after independence from the French in the twentieth century did not eradicate Berber culture. Berbers in Morocco have largely maintained their pre-Islamic traditions and cultural rituals. By settling in remote mountain areas, they have largely been able to preserve their native tongue, culture, customs, and social systems. As a result, Berbers today are generally bilingual with colloquial Arabic" (Ennaji 2014, 94). The advancements of the modern world have integrated even the most remote Amazigh communities into their societies through media, education, industrialization, etc. Amazigh, as a result, had no choice

but to become hyper-aware of their identity, and many, as Ennaji points out, began to become very resistant to assimilation efforts, and increasingly aimed to promote Amazigh identity. Though up to 30 million people speak the Tamazight language across North Africa, as of 2001, "a closer look at the situation reveals that if there is no official protection of this language, within the next few generations, its speakers will be scarce to find" (Assiati 2001, 63-64). Not too long after the publication of Ennaji's research, however, the state of Tamazight language preservation would take a dramatic turn.

The introduction of Tamazight language instruction in the Moroccan school system was an overdue policy that Imazighen has tirelessly advocated for. Similarly, Tamazight was introduced to public school curriculums in Algeria in 1995 after about five years of Tamazight language institution growth in the nation's universities. The integration of Tamazight language curriculum into public education, as well as the subsequent recognition of Tamazight as an official language of both countries, starkly contrasted decades of repressive language policies. Like other ethno-linguistic minorities in the region, these formerly repressive policies were within the areas of education, land rights, political participation, and social and cultural policy, all of which fueled Amazigh resistance.

Despite being early opponents of French colonialism in North Africa, Imazighen and the Amazigh movement were often accused by Arab nationalists of being tools of French colonial ideology. These allegations were inflamed by the passing of the Berber decree or 'Dahir Berbere' passed in the spring of 1930, which "was meant to institutionalize two different legal systems in Morocco: one for the Imazighen, deriving its essence from the local customary laws, and one for Arabs, based on the Islamic law or the 'Shariaa'... This decree was fervently opposed by both Arabs and Imazighen and ceased to apply a few years later" (Aissiati 2001, 61). This divide-and-rule strategy, a theme Migdal describes as common among weak states attempting to exercise social control, though it ultimately failed, fed the

narrative that the Amazigh were ideologically complicit in French colonial rule, and that “any one advocating any sort of separate or different identity is working in the same direction, that is, supporting a colonial ideology” (Aissiati 2001, 61). To Arabists, the recognition of heterogeneity would divide North Africans and undermine independence efforts, despite centuries of peaceful coexistence that has existed between Amazigh and Arab North Africans. As a result, Arabization became a solution to this supposed weakness, and a weapon against French colonialism. However, this had adverse consequences, since Ali Alalou argues that “Counter-intuitively, this language inequality affects the status of Tamazight and dialectal Arabic, making them seem, like French, to conflict with "authentic" Arabic. This is, of course, an odd juxtaposition, given the fact that Tamazight and dialectal Arabic are the mother tongues of most Moroccans. Boukous argues that defending Arabic against French, and defining identity in terms of Arabization, denies other languages the status of national recognition (24). Thus, any move to incorporate languages other than standard Arabic, even native languages such as Tamazight and dialectical Arabic, are judged as favoring French” (Alalou 2006, 414-415). Associating minority issues, particularly that of linguistic minorities, as being sympathetic towards imperial powers was a trend unfortunately common in the region. It further proves the deep wounds that European colonial powers left in SWANA societies that saw complete unity and homogeneity as the only effective resistance against colonial powers. This mindset was only reenforced by North African states as they grappled for social control in the hopes of establishing a strong state. Unity against colonial powers, however, did not have to come at the expense of minority linguistic rights such as that of the Amazigh. It is evident in the case of the Amazigh as well as other minorities in the region such as the Kurds that minority groups also suffer at the hands of imperial powers, and do not need to conform to Arab nationalistic assimilation principles to contribute to an effective resistance.

The post-colonial era in Francophone North Africa was when the rejection of the French language and its total replacement with Arabic became state policy. One of the most significant focuses of Arabization policy was education reform. In Morocco, where the Amazigh make up forty percent of the population, public schools not only educated solely in Modern Standard Arabic but focused the curriculum on Arab history and disregarded the Amazigh history of North Africa. Ali Alalou, in his study of language and ideology in North Africa, argues that "The confrontation between Francophonie and traditionalism (i.e., Arabization) had the unforeseen consequence of marginalizing both Tamazight language and dialectal Arabic, the two languages that actually represent the mother tongues of all Moroccans" (Alalou 2006, 412). This policy of a single state language, as Alalou suggests, not only hurt Imazighen by limiting their employment options and compromising a vital aspect of their identity but hurt Moroccans as a whole as bilingualism was already present in academics and employment opportunities: "In practical terms, for the majority of the public, success in the job market is achievable through a solid bilingual education, which the totally Arabized public schools fail to provide. In fact, French is still seen as a positive force that can contribute to the development of the Moroccan education system" (Alalou 2006, 414).

Though there have not been aggressive linguistic suppression policies in North Africa to the degree of anti-Kurdish or anti-Syriac policies in Southwest Asia, Arabization policies that nationalized the Arabic language still threatened the survival of Tamazight. Tamazight has historically been a spoken language with no formal writing system until recently, so Amazigh relied on Arabic or French for writing. Nationalizing the Arabic language as the only language available in schools and many government jobs only increased dependency on Arabic, disrupting the centuries long history of bilingualism, and even trilingualism in Morocco. Moroccan Imazighen had two main demands in response to this policy: the Tamazight language being granted official status, and the incorporation of the Imazighen into

socio-political arenas (Ennaji 2014, 93).

Rising demands from Amazigh communities in Morocco were addressed in 1994, when King Hassan II announced the introduction of Tamazight language instruction in primary schools. Though poorly implemented at first, the rise of King Mohamed VI in 1999 was followed by democratization efforts, including a more open approach to the Imazighen and their demands. With the Moroccan state's growing concern with the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, the Amazigh "did not pose as stark a threat to Morocco's image as a modern, secular state as Islamists did. As such, some political groups threw their weight behind the Berber cause to keep Islamists out of power" (Ennaji 2014, 96). In 2001, King Mohammed VI introduced the creation of the Royal Institute for Amazigh Culture, which aimed to normalize and standardize Tamazight in all sectors of society, particularly in education and media where it had previously been excluded. In 2003, his predecessor's policy of including Tamazight language instruction in primary schools finally went into effect in over 300 schools, and today over five thousand schools in the country teach Tamazight.

This promotion of the Tamazight language inspired political parties in Morocco to address Amazigh issues more, issues that went hand in hand with pro-democracy policies. Young Moroccans took to the streets to protest corruption and support reforms, resulting in a separation of legislative, judicial, and executive powers, and the recognition of Amazigh as an official language in Morocco in 2011. In this time, Moroccan Amazigh have also seen a boom in Tamazight-language press and media, and Amazigh music has gone from being associated with folklore and local music to being a genre of music popular across Morocco. In Algeria, Tamazight became a recognized language in 2002, and then became an officially recognized language in the Algerian constitution in 2016. Tamazight requirements in primary schools, despite the incredible progress made, still have much room for improvement. Mohammed Errihani says that "[i]t must be pointed out, however, that the potential for

implementing any language policy requires a certain congruence between the policy and people's beliefs and practices. In other words, what is more important than the teaching of the language itself is the ability of a policy to first change popular beliefs and perceptions about that language" (Errihani 2006, 144).

Though not perfect, the efforts made by both the Moroccan and Algerian governments towards the advancement of Amazigh rights and the recognition and promotion of the Tamazight language are a positive example of state-minority relations in the region. The Amazigh movement since this progression has transformed from a cultural one to a political one. Now securing the efforts of the government in their linguistic and cultural preservation, Imazighen now hope to prevent the "folklorization" of their culture, and have mobilized with more political objectives, such as education, development, and inequality faced by rural Imazighen (Silverstein 2009, 171). In recognizing the Tamazight language and Amazigh culture, Morocco and Algeria have not only met enough Amazigh demands to deintensify the resistance and autonomous movement once present among them but have strengthened their states by mobilizing Amazigh not through coercion or assimilation, but through inclusivity and recognition. As a result of this positive expansion of social control, the Amazigh now have spaces in which they can voice their concerns, and institutions that could help them do so.

North African countries like Morocco and Algeria could very well set a precedent for other nations in the region. Since the Imazighen have historically been crucial actors in North African culture and politics, separatism or demands of total autonomy are not as strong as, for example, the Kurds. Amazigh have advocated for greater inclusion into their respective countries, demands that over the past two decades, have finally been addressed by their governments.

VIII. Minority and the State: The Question of Autonomy

In the context of discourse around minority ethno-linguistic groups, 'autonomy' is often a buzzword that is often inapplicable to the issue at hand. Not all "minority" groups in the SWANA region strive for autonomy. In addition, there is a struggle between state autonomy and minority autonomy. As evident in Migdal's state-society relations model, weak states aiming to strengthen their positions may see minority groups as a threat to state autonomy. In perceiving them as a threat to state autonomy and attempting to exert social control within minority communities through oppressive policies fueled by assimilationist ideals, the state antagonizes the minority group, and, ironically, is more likely to fuel the group's autonomous aspirations. A weak state attempting to secure its autonomy at the expense of a minority group does so by utilizing strategies such as favoritism, repression, and division within its policies regarding education, land rights, political participation, religious institutions, as well as social and cultural policies. Though suceeding to a degree in threatening the existence of an ethno-linguistic group by both driving their emigration and assimilating them, these strategies also have the adverse effect of fueling resistance movements and resentment towards the states. If provoked enough, autonomous aspirations, as proven by Iraqi Kurds, will serve as a true threat to state autonomy as the state, having failed at completely assimilating the minority, will have no choice but to allow the minority to become self-sufficient and autonomous. In summary, states that enflame tensions between themselves and a minority group through oppressive policies aimed at social control will ultimately fail and weaken their state and their autonomy further and threaten the survival of the minority group.

States like Morocco and Algeria that eventually met the demands of the Amazigh and strengthened social control through creating organizations and institutions that would integrate Amazigh into society without the requirement of assimilation, strengthen their state, as well as their autonomy. Even though the Imazighen still have concerns that they advocate

on behalf of, their recognition on a governmental and social level and access to state institutions that were created in response to their struggle empowered them to become enthusiastic participants in their respective states. Rather than fighting for complete autonomy, Imazighen mobilize both on behalf of the state and themselves and continue to strive towards their now-primary goals of economic and political representation. Their increasing presence in North African society and politics strengthen the autonomy of North African states without endangering the cultural and linguistic heritage of the Imazighen.

Minority autonomous movements are typically more common among distinct ethno-linguistic groups with their own distinct cultures and languages than other types of minorities. Minorities that may only use another language liturgically or do not occupy distinct regions of the state may be more integrated in a state and despite oppression, may not lean initially towards autonomy. For many, autonomy had never even crossed their minds, collectively speaking. Coptic Christians, for example, take issue with their "minority" status. Their goals include obtaining equal political, civil, economic, and legal rights with their Muslim neighbors, and nothing more. For Copts, who are ethnically indistinguishable from most Muslim Egyptians and whose long co-existence with Muslims led to a maintenance of both Islamic and Coptic pre-Islamic traditions, separatism was rarely thought of as a solution to their troubles. Pennington argued that

> Copts and Muslims share a common national loyalty. Their concepts of what being Egyptian entails-the relative importance of pharaonic, Arab, and Mediterranean components, often differ, and Muslims sometimes doubt the Copt's loyalties to the regime at the moment. But when faced with external challenges, as in 1967 or 1973, there has been little in any practical difference between the reactions of the two communities (Pennington 1982, 177-178).

Repressive policies of the Egyptian government, along with various actions by Coptic church leadership that aimed to seclude Copts more, both contributed to the 'othering' of Copts in Egyptian society, which fanned the flames of division in the country. Copts, as present in their political activism that often has gone against the political standing of the Church, have shown time and time again through both their unity with Muslim Egyptians during times of upheaval as well as their own self-advocacy in the wake of anti-Coptic attacks, that they do not ask for preferential treatment or for official designation as a 'minority', but simply that they be treated and protected the same as their Muslim neighbors. This, if anything, means less distinction from their fellow Egyptians, as opposed to more. For example, the discontinuation of religious identifiers on ID, and their integration into the political system.

What does this mean for the survival of the Coptic language? As mentioned, the Coptic language is both the heritage of Christian AND Muslim Egyptians. Many modern-day dialectal Egyptian Arabic words have Coptic roots, as do Egyptian Muslims. Preserving Coptic is crucial to the survival of Egyptian Christian tradition but crucial to understanding Egyptian history. The hypothetical government involvement in Coptic preservation would not just benefit Copts but would be in the best interest of all Egyptians due to their shared background.

Like Copts, whose everyday spoken language is Arabic, Arab Christians in Syria aim for inclusion into their society Since they usually identify with their fellow Arabs, they typically do not gravitate towards aspirations of autonomy. It's also important to note that while Copts face obstacles from both their government and extremist groups, Syrian Christians do not face the same level of repression and systematic discrimination from their government as Copts do. Instead, their primary threat over the past decade has been from extremist groups like the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda that at one point took advantage of the

instability present in the nation to gain vast territories. These extremist groups, though a threat to Syrians of all backgrounds, did carry out severe persecution against Christians and caused their numbers to plummet. Syrian Christians clung to their government and increasingly offered support to Bashar al-Assad, who eventually retook the entire nation (except for Idlib) from both ISIS and rebel forces. Though Syrians of all backgrounds still lack many of the basic rights that they initially had advocated for at the beginning of the Arab spring, the Syrian government continues to offer its protection against extremism as a bargaining chip to garner support of its people, particularly the Christian minority that face a unique threat and have little to no support besides that of the government, regardless about the negative sentiments they may or may not have against it. In a way, the introduction of ISIS and other extremist factions into the Syrian war, despite wreaking havoc on Syrian society, killing thousands, and displacing millions, gave the Syrian government a chance to strengthen its autonomy by offering Syrians its protection and mobilizing them in an anti-ISIS effort. Despite their true feelings about the Syrian government, many Syrians now feel there is no choice but to support the state as the opposition is unorganized and weak, and the only other option are extremist groups such as ISIS. Though rallying the Syrian people, including Syrian Christians, against a common threat allowed the Syrian state to increase its strength and autonomy, it is unknown how long this strength will last as extremist group have been largely defeated and a severe economic crisis plunges much of Syria to brink of disparity. The Syrian state may once again face a reckoning from its own people in the future, but its status as the chief protector of its people from extremism allows it to cling onto its autonomy and social control for the time being.

The Assyrian/Syriac Christians, unlike Copts, have in recent decades been targeted for their status as a distinct ethno-linguistic group rather than their status as a minority religious group. Unlike Syrian Arab Christians, they faced intense marginalization and repression from

the Iraqi state in addition to the more recent threat of extremism and conflict. This repression, as established, had brutal consequences for the Assyrians of Iraq, who fled in large waves throughout Saddam Hussein's rule as well as throughout the turmoil caused in the nation following his deposition. Repressive policies in Iraq often seemed to have no end in sight and fueled ethno-nationalist desires of Assyrians. This ethno-nationalism conflicted with Kurdish nationalism and the two groups share many of their ancestral lands. Unlike Assyrians, Kurds are much larger in number and had not fled the region to the extent that Assyrians had, making their ambitions the slightest bit more attainable. Historic animosity between the two ethno-linguistic groups, fueled in part by Turkey, make the concept of an autonomous Assyrian homeland incredibly complicated. Though Naby argues that "If the Aramaic speakers are to survive in their indigenous homeland, they have concluded that they can only do so within a prescribed area dedicated to them" (Naby 2005, 201-202), the option of territoriality directly conflicts with Kurdish territoriality. For a consensus on territoriality to be reached, Assyrians, Kurds, and the Iraqi government must all be fully on board and willing to put aside ethnic chauvinism to lead discussions. This may be more possible now than under the Hussein regime, but instability in the country still hinders full cooperation between the three groups. As Naby has pointed out, the preservation of the Aramaic language will fail if purely left up to the diaspora as it requires a base in its historic homeland- Iraq. For this base to exist, one of two options remain, a stark reversal in Iraqi policy towards the group where the government officially recognizes the group and puts in a valiant effort to undo the effects of its own repressive policies towards them, or the agreement upon territoriality, which would rely heavily on Kurds and their willingness (or lack thereof) in approving local Assyrian autonomy in portions of their territory. Both options, for the time being, seem unattainable, but are crucial to address if Assyrians and their ancient language are to survive.

Kurds remain the most hopeful case for autonomy in the region. They are one of the

largest stateless ethnic groups in the world, their population outnumbering that of Canada and even Australia. Their success in autonomous rule in Iraq has set a noteworthy example for Syrian, Turkish, and Iranian Kurds, all of whom share the same political and militaristic capabilities as their Iraqi counterparts but live within states hesitant and even fearful of granting them full regional autonomy like that of Iraq. Kurdish autonomy, obviously in incompatible with state autonomy given their numbers and the size of their territory.

The Kurds in Syria seized the opportunity that the Syrian war gave them to assert their own dominance in their regions and protect their homeland from the threat of ISIS. The retreat of the Syrian authorities in Kurdish regions in 2012 resulted in a kind of de-facto autonomy centered in Rojava, but never an official recognition of Kurdish areas as nationally recognized autonomous zones. After being betrayed by international allies, Syrian Kurds became vulnerable to territory encroachments by Turkey, whose animosity towards Syrian Kurds have, in recent years, greatly shaped their approach to Turkish Kurds. Turkish Kurds, though briefly experiencing a loosening of anti-Kurdish policies in Turkey, are often cracked down on by the Turkish government as a response to their own militaristic organization. Iran's Kurdish population, much like Syria and Turkey, continue to face political repression. The relative success of the de-facto Kurdish autonomous zone in Syria may prompt Damascus to officially recognize its autonomy, but this may not occur until the conclusion of the Syrian war. As for Turkish and Iranian Kurds, autonomy remains their main objective, however the possibility of such hangs in the balance as conflict plagues the region. It is evident, however, that the governments of the region have proven time and time again their refusal in weaving Kurds into the fabric of their nations without their assimilation. Likewise, many Kurds refuse to assimilate or give in to government demands. Their identity remains threatened so long as these states continue their repressive politics, leaving autonomy to be the only reasonable solution.

Though Amazigh separatism has been ambitiously sought after by various groups across North Africa, overall, the Amazigh aimed for, and in many ways achieved recognition and linguistic and cultural protection from North African governments. The formal recognition of Tamazight as an official state language, introduction of Tamazight into primary schools, and establishment of Amazigh linguistic and cultural institutions made strides in protecting the Tamazight language that had been threatened by decades of Arabization policies in North Africa. These policies have strengthened the Moroccan and Algerian states as it eased anti-state sentiment and began the process of mobilizing Amazigh communities and officially integrating them into social and political life. Now, having achieved linguistic and cultural recognition and protection, the Amazigh move towards political and economic activism, and have slowly made progress in improving their countries' democratic processes.

Autonomy is not always a solution for ethno-linguistic minorities. As we have seen in the case of the Copts and the Syrian Christians, the very use of the term "minority" implies otherness and exclusion from broader society. Copts and Syrian Christians never advocated for any type of special treatment or separation from their neighbors, but rather a recognition of their language and/or identity as one that belongs to their country's common heritage, and the promotion of equal rights between them and their countrymen. Amazigh, though once forming separatist movements in response to harsh anti-Amazigh Arabization policies in Morocco and Algeria, still saw themselves as a part of the greater fabric of the heritage of these states and dialed down the separationist sentiment once ethe states decided to meet their demands. In cases such as these, the recent policies of Morocco and Algeria may provide a basic blueprint as to how to meet the demands of groups like the Copts or even the Aramaic-speakers in Maaloula. States in the SWANA region, as well as other states such as Canada or the U.S., all of which have grappled with minority linguistic rights in the past, are, if

anything, strengthened by the recognition of language rights and the establishment of institutions that promote these rights. While state-society relations are hurt by oppressive expressions of power by the state on minorities in the quest for social control, inclusive policies like those of Morocco and Algeria can be the first step to both securing the autonomy of the state through non-oppressive strategies of social control while protective ethno-linguistic minorities and their distinct languages and cultures.

In other instances, autonomy may be the only solution, as is proven with the Kurds, who have long insisted upon self-rule. Assyrians, though having historically been advocates for their own territoriality, have fled Iraq, Syria, and Turkey in droves, leaving a dwindling Assyrian population behind in their homelands. It is questionable whether such a small group could maintain its own autonomous zones to the same extent that they hypothetically would have been able to in their pre-emigration numbers given the creation thereof was even a possibility. Until the Iraqi government as well as Kurdish leaders agree to recognize the Assyrian question, this question of autonomy will remain unanswered, regardless of how passionately many Assyrians may have advocated for it.

The tables below compare the various case studies by assessing state policies on whether they currently positively or negatively affect the groups. Policies that negatively affect these groups are those in which states deploy strategies like favoritism, divide-and conquer strategy, and repression to take social control while policies that positively impact a group would achieve social control through inclusion and the establishment of organizations and institutions that both assist and mobilize the group in question. Though issues surrounding these policies and their use by states are detailed throughout all the case studies, this table can help depict how the intention of these policies can fuel resistance or autonomy movements.

Table 2: State Policy Regarding SWANA Minority Groups

Current State Policy	*Syria (Assyrians)*	*Iraq (Assyrians)*	*Egypt (Copts)*	*Morocco (Amazigh)*	*Algeria (Amazigh)*
Education	+	-	o	+	+
Land Rights	+	-	-	+	+
Political Participation	+	-	-	-	-
Social Policy	o	o	o	+	+
Religious Rights	+	+	-	o	o
Struggle for Autonomy?	no	yes	no	no	no

Key

+ positive policies of social control (-) negative policies of social control (o) no policy

(+) positive policies only within autonomous zone (+) positive policy with the expectation of assimilation

These tables do not consider autonomous regions in the case of the Kurds. Where states do not specify either oppressive (such as Kurdish language bans) or preservationist policies (such as education policies in North Africa requiring the instruction of Tamazight in schools), an "o" indicated that the effect of the policy is neither positive nor negative as it does not apply. Though state policies regarding Kurds were already explained through Table 1, Table 3 mentions Kurdish groups in Syria, Iraq, Turkey, and Iran to compare their experience under state policies regarding their existence to the experience of other minority ethnolinguistic or religious groups in the region, as is shown both in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 3: State Policy Regarding SWANA Minority Groups (cont.)

Current State	*Kurds (Iraq, Syria, and Turkey)*	*Kurds (Iran)*	*Syria (non-Aramaic-speaking Christians)*
Education	-	-	o
Land Rights	-	-	o
Political Participation	- (not including autonomous regions)	- (not including autonomous regions)	+
Social Policy	- (not including autonomous regions)	o	+
Religious Rights	o	-	+
Struggle For Autonomy?	yes	yes	no

Key:

+ positive policies of social control (-) negative policies of social control (o) no policy

(±) positive policies only within autonomous zone (±) positive policy with the expectation of assimilation

As the tables show, the implementation of oppressive policies in any of these areas increase the probability of a minority group's resentment and thus resistance towards the state. Though states intend for these oppressive policies to put minority groups in line and force them into assimilation under the impression that doing so would strengthen the state and its social control, these policies only fuel minority movements that increasingly favor autonomy the more repressive state policies get. Another result of these policies is, obviously, the decrease in minority language usage among ethno-linguistic minorities, and an overall

threat to the survival of their language and heritage as they continued to be pressured into assimilation. As proven in Migdal's state-society relations model, oppressive policies such as these are behaviors associated with weak states that grapple for strength through social control, but go about it through strategies like favoritism, divide-and-conquer, and repression, all legacies of the European colonial era. As evident in this table, states that put to reach out to ethno-linguistic minority communities through strongmen, institutions and organizations that deal with their various needs, can achieve social control and mobilize even the most remote communities without threatening their very identities. This is the behavior of a strong state.

IX. Conclusion

The official recognition and protection of Tamazight in North Africa was followed by waves of democratic reforms, proving that acknowledging and improving the condition of ethno-linguistic minority rights in the region is compatible with stability and national unity as well as state strength and autonomy, and that minority politics and language rights only divide and weaken the state if the state rather than strengthen or unify it.

As evident in the relationships between states and their linguistic minorities, states like Algeria and Morocco that not only recognize minority languages but build institutions around them, have the capacity to set this national unity into fruition without endangering the heterogeneous linguistic or ethnic heritage of the country. Algeria and Morocco still have improvements to be made in increasing Amazigh representation into their political systems but have overall escaped the toxic divisions set in place by colonial powers and in turn allowed the Amazigh movement to progress all while strengthening their own states. This progression in Amazigh linguistic rights has allowed Amazigh to focus more on economic issues that plague them as well as North African society, ultimately ushering their societies

into a new era of democracy and self-awareness that strengthens their states while simultaneously strengthening the state of their ethno-linguistic rights.

Turkey, Syria, and Iran, on the other hand, still employ nationalistic state-society relation tactics that originally emerged in the post-colonial era. The result is a systemic aggression to certain linguistic minorities that, to them, threaten the nationalistic fabric of their states, an ideal as we have seen in the case of Morocco and Algeria to be a long-expired resistance ideology that no longer needs to be deployed and weakens states with linguistic minorities rather than strengthen them. In the cases of Syria, Turkey, and Iran, as well as Ba'athist Iraq, this aggression was particularly violent and stubborn, driving Kurds so far away from hopes of a peaceful existence within their respective states that now their own regional autonomy seems to be the only solution that could ease them. This means that for both Kurds and the states they are currently a part of to be satisfied, there must be substantial trade-offs. For these states, it means a possible loss of control over their Kurdish regions. For Kurds, this means the pressure of becoming self-reliant and no longer accessing the resources of these former states, as well as the loss of certain lands that these states may be reluctant to hand back to them.

Despite having more in common with Kurds in that they are a persecuted linguistic minority, Assyrians or Aramaic-speaking Christians may be easily grouped with Arab Christians in the prospects of their future and survival. Now too few and too scattered to sustain hopes for autonomous regional control such as the hopes of the Kurds, Assyrians main hope, much like Arab Christians, are the strengthening of minority institutions within their states, as well as increased political representation. This goes not only for Iraq and Syria, but for the autonomous Kurdistan region in Iraq in which many Assyrians live in or have recently fled to. Syria, though having instituted a degree of Aramaic- preservation initiatives, must grapple with the devastating effects that a decade of war and destruction has

unleashed on the nation, including the destruction of important physical aspects of Assyrian heritage and the emigration of this ancient community. This means strengthening Aramaic-preservation programs as well as ensuring that social and economic rebuilding or revival extend to even the remote Assyrian villages that have been constant targets of violence and ethnic cleansing by the Islamic State. Arab Christians in Syria can also benefit from these efforts as they share a common heritage. As for Iraqi Assyrians, decades of ethnic cleansing and persecution by the Iraqi state and its intense Arabization efforts have made it difficult to envision a future for Assyrians in the nation, but since autonomy is unlikely, the Iraqi government must learn from the mistakes of its Ba'athist past and follow in the footsteps of countries like Algeria or Morocco to save the Assyrian language and culture.

Like Arab Christians in Syria benefitting from Aramaic-preservation institutions, Egyptian Muslims would benefit from Coptic preservation institutions as it would enhance the country's common heritage. These hypothetical institutions, however, cannot exist or thrive without the help of Coptic Christians, who have been the Coptic language's protectors for over a millennium. Unlike Algeria or Morocco, preserving this minority language and people isn't just rooted in declaring Coptic an official language (as it is not a widely spoken language like Tamazight), but is only feasible by removing the systematic divides that perpetuate legal or social inequality between Christians and Muslims from the Egyptian legal system, and punishing acts of persecution that have risen in recent decades. This can be followed by the establishment of Coptic preservation institutions that gather the interests of all Egyptians, Muslim and Christian alike.

Despite the best efforts of ethnolinguistic groups and their counterparts in the diaspora to preserve their rich cultural and linguistic heritage, these efforts can only succeed if nurtured and implemented by SWANA states that they call their home. This solution seems simple enough in theory, however, as Pföstl and Kymlicka argue:

> In the MENA region, as in most of the postcolonial world, ethnic politics is widely seen as a threat to social cohesion and political stability, if not outright secession and irredentism, and authoritarian rulers have justified their repressive rule in part on the grounds that they alone can contain this threat (Pföstl and Kymlicka, 2015).

The topic of minority rights is, however, resisted and considered taboo in many SWANA nations. To these nations, many of whom went through (or perhaps are still going through) a stage of nationalism in the post-colonial era, pluralism seems to threaten the stability of their society, when, the success of minority rights is "the barometer of a successful transition to democracy" (Pföstl and Kymlicka, 2015). Even though many SWANA states voted in favor of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities in 1992 as well as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007, the Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic conference have remained some of the few regional organizations to refrain from developing any type of initiatives that would work towards the objectives of these declarations. Future research on SWANA linguistic minorities should focus on the worldwide progression of indigenous peoples and minorities as well as the impact (or lack thereof) these UN-endorsed progressions may have on SWANA nations. This includes analyzing successful linguistic preservation initiatives taken by both SWANA and non-SWANA nations and applying them within the contexts of SWANA nations to see which initiatives may be most effective. Future studies should also monitor the decline in nationalism in the SWANA region and how linguistic minorities may benefit from this phenomenon and monitor the autonomous Kurdish zone in Iraq as a possible example for Kurdish autonomy in neighboring states.

Southwest Asia and North Africa have long shed the threat of colonial encroachment and now see political instability and radicalism as their principal threats. No amount of ethnic or linguistic chauvinism can curb these threats or unify their populations, only national unity based on common interests rather than common backgrounds can make significant headway towards that goal. States throughout the SWANA region continue to strive towards strengthening their autonomy and statehood on the world stage. It is evident that policies that promote state ethno-nationalism and assimilation of minorities only deepen divides in a state, threaten ethno-linguistic or religious minorities, and fuel enough resentment for an organized resistance to exist. In sum, these policies do not strengthen states, but weaken them by failing to establish social control by any other means than coercion, and thus failing to properly mobilize its citizens. Policies that respect and recognize minority languages and ethnic groups typically succeed in mobilizing society and strengthening the state without risking either the survival of minority languages and cultures or risking the autonomy of the state. The 21st century has introduced a greater emphasis on minority linguistic rights and indigenous rights across the world, and if the SWANA region is to unify against the threats it faces, it must be able to promote national unity while still protecting and promoting the heritage of its ethno-linguistic minorities.

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