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Summary of the thesis

Minority, Identity, and Security in the Middle East.
Case Study: The Kurdish Minority

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Research objectives

Our work seeks, as its title indicates, research links that can be established between several central concepts such as "security", "minority" and "identity." We start from the observation that links between these variables are not unicausal, although identity seems to occupy an intermediate position.

The very title of our thesis can be considered a research question, because we designed our entire approach based on the question: Is there a link between "minority", "identity" and "security" in the Middle East?

A much more difficult goal is the validation of theories of international relations using existing empirical inventory in the Middle East. It is difficult because the logic working in this geostrategic region of the world seems not to be governed by the same rules as those that govern the West, and most theories of thinking from the western world space. We formulate theoretical statements based on observations made in analyzing our case studies, which could be developed in a subsequent paper.

A subsidiary objective of this work is to create a model for analyzing the relationships between the basic concepts and phenomena and processes that occur in the target region, the Middle East. The reason is clear: as part of the neighborhood of Europe, Central Asia and Africa, the Middle East will play a pivotal role in future global politics. This region is one of the richest in mineral resources of the regions over the world and among the most dynamic in terms of population. Moreover, Islam is now one of the fastest growing religions in the world, but also the most challenging to address political and cultural model promoted by the West in recent centuries.

The structure of the thesis

The first part of our thesis, *Minority, identity, and security in international relations – theoretical and conceptual analysis*, aims to critically analyze the role of minorities as actors on the stage of international relations using certain theories and approaches to the study of international relations. To show the relationship between the proposed variables - **minority identity and security** - we believe that a review of how minorities were defined, over time, in relation to the 'conventional' actors of international relations (the states, according to the realists), or 'unconventional' actors (international institutions and organizations according to the liberal institutionalists).

In the Chapter *Identity, social psychology and sociology* two levels of humanity are considered: the individual and the group. This is because a minority arises when a group identity emerges. The paper answers the question of how group identity emerges and how the group affects the individual identity.

For the present study is interesting to see how the transition from the individual to the collective is made. The manner in which a certain person acts individually is very different from his/her behavior inside a group. This raises a question: why is it that the group influences the individual and not vice versa?

For a clearer picture of what "minorities" are defined in this thesis, the operational taxonomy employed here is: national, ethnic, religious or gender minorities. Although they are non-state actors, they function within states, but often they come to have a transnational identity.

In the second part of our thesis, called *The Westphalian state system exported in the Middle East*, we have tried to capture the main changes that took place after World War I, which we have considered of crucial importance for the study of minorities in the Middle East. This is because there were territorial and political transformations unrivaled until the Arab spring of 2011-2012. Without this part we could not relate to minorities in the Middle East because one must consider the context in which they are placed.

We believe that this part is required in our analysis because many of the current conflicts in the Middle East are due to changes produced in this period of great turmoil and not only for the region upon which the paper focuses. Moreover, some authors consider that the period immediately following First World War marks the beginning of the modern state system in the Middle East.

However, in our opinion, a diachronic account of the events could not offer the necessary insight in the period. Hence, our approach was to sprinkle this chapter with a series of turns in the past to better account the social, economic or cultural causes surrounding the events unfolding before the First World War.

At the end of part II, we focused on the causes of nationalism in the Middle East. Although Arab nationalism was given greater attention, we wrote also about Turkish, Iranian, and about other nationalisms bursting in North Africa, trying to make sense of the present.

The subchapter "The state of Israel and Arab nationalism" approaches only remotely the problem of the Palestinian minority, since the issue is also treated in the subchapter "Ethnic and national minorities". The thesis focuses instead on evaluating the impact of the creation

and existence of the Israeli state upon the Arab nationalism, that is why we have chosen to present only some events considered relevant for this subchapter.

We insisted on the appearance of nationalism in the Middle East, always making references to minorities who were in the area when the Great Powers have established the mandates. The effects of the artificial division of the region have marked the fate of the minorities living in the newly created states.

In the third part, entitled *Minorities in the Middle East* we intended to address some of the representative minorities for our approach, namely those who could answer our research question from which we started: Is there a relationship between minority identity and security in the Middle East? Therefore we will not mention all minorities in the Middle East (we preferred to emphasize more the issue of the Kurdish minority in the Middle East because of the unique nature), which would be impossible due to time and space limit. Moreover, our thesis could be a starting point for future research.

In every country the Kurds live, their situation is different due to different contexts. For example, Danielle Mitterrand considers that the actions of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) are the result of the political violence that Turkey has developed towards the Kurds since the birth of the Turkish Republic. The Kurds are in this situation since the emergence of the nation-states in the Middle East, that brought with them not only different administrative and control for security systems, but also new political ideologies. In the four countries where the Kurds live (Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey), methods such as denial of the right to existence, denying the Kurdish language, or denial of Kurdish prevalence in some regions were used. These methods have led to policies such as genocidal campaigns, deportations and mass expulsions, homogenization and assimilation policy, coercive administrative systems and security control systems, or even partial recognition of autonomy. The results of these policies did not fail to occur: massive internal deportations, destruction of cities, the militarization of states and societies, repression of political parties, etc. All of these varied in intensity and duration from country to country.

It is for these reasons that we have considered necessary a brief overview of the main events that changed the history of Kurds living in each country. We considered the case of the Kurds representative for Middle East's security since there were many events linked to the Kurdish minority that have caused insecurity in the region. It is enough to remember the wave of the two million Kurdish refugees who emerged in the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-1988. The Kurdish problem became highly publicized in recent years mainly due to the

person of Abdullah Ocalan, around which was formed the PKK, a terrorist organization recognized for its attacks.

Conclusions

At the beginning of our research we were wondering if there was a link between minority identity and security in the Middle East, trying during our thesis to always refer to these concepts.

For a better understanding of the emergence of a minority, we have used the sociology and the social psychology. According to the latter, the individual personality plays an important role as does the group identity. If the individual loses his identity, he risks being swallowed by a group and being mistaken by a group identity. Addressing individual and group identities has shown that the human being is very unpredictable.

Studying Minorities in the Middle East is a challenge for any researcher in social and human sciences because it involves, first, a good knowledge of the region, especially from the point of view of Middle Eastern history before and after the First World War.

During the Ottoman Empire, there were religious loyalties as the administrative organization of the Empire in the so-called system of *millets* proved. For the population in the region it has been difficult to assimilate the Westphalian state model that the West wanted to implant there after the First World War. And this, although many Western ideas had entered the Middle East in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, initially with Christian schools established here, and then due to all the attempts to reform the Ottoman Empire in its last years of life.

Immediately after World War I, a series of meetings of the Great Powers and documents developed during these meetings decided the fate of the peoples of the Middle East. Suffice it to recall the Paris Peace Conference, the Treaties of Sevres and Lausanne and the Balfour Declaration.

There were some countries that have managed to gain independence shortly after the First World War and who had a tremendous destiny, such as Turkey. And this was mainly due to leaders such as Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. He reformed Turkey, realizing that, if he had not managed to do it, it could disappear from the map of the world. But, emphasizing the Turkism, Kemal created a problem that would later explode: the Kurdish minority - which did

not loose its identity despite the various policies that the Turkish government has adopted over time.

Kemal actually created a vulnerability for the future of Turkey, as with the creation of the PKK, a major source of insecurity appeared in the Turkish state. What is worse is the autonomy of working PKK members: despite the fact that Abdullah Ocalan was captured and imprisoned Imralı island in the Marmara Sea, his followers were well trained what to do in such a situation. We believe that the entire Kurdish minority is discredited by the PKK terrorist nature.

Moreover, in the context of Turkey's accession to the European Union, various NGOs advocating for human rights put pressure on Turkey to respect the rights of minorities living in Turkey and in particular the Kurds.

The case of Saudi Arabia is also interesting, for this country has survived in a completely opposite strategy compared to Turkey: Ibn Saud decided to preserve the sanctity of Wahhabi Islamic traditions, creating a state based on tribal alliances. It is true that the difference was the discovery of oil, which ensured an income to the country. This ensured the stability of a heterogeneous country in terms of identity, with multiple, tribal loyalties.

Although they started off with the best intentions, the Great Powers mandatated by the League of Nations drew an artificial map of the Middle East, regardless of ethnic and religious realities on the ground. These artificial entities that were to become independent (Syria, Lebanon, Iraq etc.), had to face serious problems in the future due to ethnic and religious discontent in those states, which often were and political minorities. Paradoxically, some of these minorities will dominate, some permanent (the Alawis in Syria) and others only for a period (the Maronites in Lebanon) politics of these countries.

Not used to the Western model of government, the population in the new mandatated territories rebelled in the early years of reign of the Great Powers. Britain and France have adopted different policies mandated territories: if Britain wanted to be the champion of self-determination and nationalism, France used the policy of "divide and rule" fragmenting as much as it could the structure of the societies over which it had received mandate, in order to keep those territories as much as possible. The artificial character of the states created by the Great Powers after World War I led to the outbreak of conflicts in the Middle East, among which we mention only the civil war in Lebanon.

In 2012 the situation of the Kurdish minority in the Middle East has not changed very much, reports on minority rights issues still signal denial to the right to use their own language in education of children or non political rights (usually Kurds are not adequately represented in the political states where they are). Since 2004, the Kurds in Syria have started a series of riots, possibly because Kurdish minority in this country did not even have identity documents, their status being controversial. In March this year a number of Kurds in Syria have sought refuge in Iraq because of the violence in Syria.

The problem of ethnic and religious minorities in the Middle East is a dynamic one, but with roots deep in the history of this turbulent region. If during the Ottoman societies of this region were already extremely heterogeneous, the attempt of the Great Powers to introduce new identities and values fragilized even more these societies, overlapping pre-modern loyalties (such as the tribal) over some modern (national identity) and even post-modern (westernized elites).

Ethnic and religious mosaic Middle East sits on a volcano that maintains a permanent state of insecurity. From time to time minor eruptions occur, local, and sometimes some major regional nature, as the Arab Spring. Compared to Western society whose modernization process took centuries, in the Middle East, the homogenization of society based on political nationalism has not occurred. Middle East was exposed to the industrial revolution, but not to the secular one.

We dare to say that the Middle East's most powerful glue of society remains Islam. The major risk is the Islamic fundamentalism that seems to gain ground in both the moderate Islam and to the democratic ideology. The reason? Most people in the region live under the poverty line, being more likely to be seduced by utopian alternative views and vindictive.

The permeability and the fluidity of borders in the era of globalization, and the tolerance shown by the West to the rest of the world can bring insecurity in the Middle East even within Europe. Thus, in a global world, regional and local apparent problems of the Middle East no longer belongs to these areas, they become part of the global security agenda and their issue will have to be solved by the global governance.