POLITICAL POLICY OF THE MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES THROUGH VEXILLOLOGY ANALYSIS
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ABSTRACT
The political policies of the Middle East countries were deeply affected by the presence of their flags. The Vexillology analysis pinpoints that internal and external conditions highly influence the history behind the country's designated flag and its change in the Middle East region which is bounded by the seven seas. In these Middle East countries, a flag demonstrates the country's political policy. This is different from other countries, especially Southeast Asia in which there is a tendency that the flag of a certain country bears no relevance with the country’s political policy. However, in the case of Middle East countries, despite the fact that the countries are separated by state boundaries, they still highly retain their ideological equations. In addition, even though they have diverse ethnic inequality, the Middle East countries are still united in terms of ideals, with some exception. However, what needs to highlight is the fact that the Middle East is very conflict-prone. This research uses literature study and field research. The researcher visited a number of Middle East country’s embassies to reinforce existing data for the validity of the research.

Keywords: Politics, History, Islam, Middle East, Vexillology.

INTRODUCTION
The Middle East area provides us with a never ending story to talk about. It ranges from religion, culture, history, to politics. It is obvious that the region that encompasses these three continents has strong religious roots, since there are at least three divine religions, which are Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, that were born in the Middle East region. When it comes to religion in the Middle East it is certain that historical factors are attached to those religions since they are closely related one to another. With the diverse ethnicities that inhabit this oil-rich area, the culture becomes highly complex. Therefore, talking about the Middle East is not only talking about the Arabs, but also talking about Turkey, Persia, Kurdish, and Barber.

The same also applies with politics in the Middle East. Our mouth may never be kept sealed from commenting on the political intricacy and various interests in this region. Such issue may range from Sunni-Shiite conflicts, Turkish turmoil with Kurds, friction between Arabs and Jews, as well as the recent hottest issue that is the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). As the name implies, the area bounded by these seven oceans is situated right in the center part of the
world. Thus, no wonder when various political interests always accrue with the countries in this region.

One way to study the political policies of Middle Eastern countries is to pay attention to their flags. Vexillology analysis is seen as the apt method for this concern since it is the study on all the aspects of flag, ranging from its color, size, proportion, and the existing symbol (Deteksi Jawa Pos, 2015: 19). In other words, the flag of a country is more than just a display, ornament, symbol, or complement. It carries substantial meaning. Thus, flag observation may lead us to the history, ideology, purpose, and political policy of a country.

This research is useful in the development of science, especially in the field of Middle Eastern politics that must be related to the history of religions. In addition, it may also function as problem solver for the developing country of Indonesia, especially in terms of foreign policy and certain religious civilizations. This is important because Indonesian diplomacy is sometimes judged to be of a double standard especially in the realm of humanity (Zahidi, 2015: 76).

**PROBLEM FORMULATION**
1. What is the history of the flags of Middle Eastern countries?
2. What are the political policies of Middle Eastern countries in terms of vexillology analysis?

**RESEARCH PURPOSES**
1. Knowing the history of flags of Middle Eastern countries.
2. Understanding the political policies of Middle Eastern countries in terms of vexillology analysis.

**THEORETICAL BASIS**
A research must be theoretically based, thus, Semiotics is used as a theoretical basis of this research. A flag is a symbol or identity of a country. Therefore, semiotics can be an apt tool to analyze this research problem. In addition, Vexillology and semiotics are two closely related studies which bear similarities. If vexillology is concentrated only on flags, semiotics addresses wider issues ranging from painting, sculpture, building, or spatial analysis.

Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia defines semiotics as the science or theory of symbols and signs. It can be applied in language, Morse code, and traffic. The study of semiotics commonly is referred to as semiology. Thus, it is expected that semiotics and vexillology can unravel clearly the meaning behind the flag of the Middle East countries to unveil their political policies based on their designated flags.

**RESEARCH SCOPE**
This study is only focused on the Middle East region as an area adjacent with the seven oceans, which are the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea, the Caspian Sea, the Black Sea, the Dead Sea, the Arabian Sea and the Persian Sea. If the theory is applied to the world map, there are some countries in the category of Middle East region. Among others are Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Turkey, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Iraq, Syria, and Iran.
Research on flags is focused in the Middle East because this region has its own uniqueness as seen from their designated flags. Some countries in the Middle East have, similar flags, or almost similar flags. Each of those country’s flags are full of meaning, and are more than just symbolic. In addition, this area is predominantly inhabited by Muslims. No wonder that a number of Middle Eastern country flags symbolizes Koran. It is just like the Scandinavian countries whose flag is identical with the cross symbol such as Denmark, Sweden, Iceland and Norway.

The time frame of this study was restricted from 1923 to 2017. 1923 was selected as the starting point because it was the downfall of the Ottoman Dynasty, an empire that almost united the entire Middle East region and even expanded to parts of Europe. After the downfall of the Ottoman Empire, its former territories were gradually occupied by the British. Sometime later, England actually divides the Middle East region into small pieces. Meanwhile, 2016 was chosen as the ending point because during this year, the Middle East was inundated with political upheaval. Such political turmoil also affected the designated flag. It is obvious that Libya and Syria once changed their country’s flag with different versions unlike the official flag of their government as legalized by the United Nations (UN).

METHOD

According to Tanudirjo (2007: 1) method is defined as the procedure to obtain information / data or carry out a study on a case. This research uses two methods namely field and literature. The research population embraces all flags of Middle Eastern countries as mentioned in Chapter 1. Data were collected from interviews and literature studies. The flag’s data were group into certain categories of similar flags, analyzed, and interpreted.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Middle East can be regarded as a society full of brave heart. This is obvious from the fact that 55% or as many as 11 countries use red as a symbol of courage. Bravery or the attitude of knights is best represented by the history that the Middle East people fight out the invaders who had gripped a number of countries in the Middle East. These countries include Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Yemen, and Syria. Some of them were once colonized by France (Morocco and Tunisia), Italy (Libya), and Britain (Egypt, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Yemen, and Syria). Meanwhile, Turkey uses red as a symbol of courage in a conquering effort to expand the area of Islamic proselytizing.

There are actually 14 countries (70%) who officially declare their nation as courageous. However, the other countries do not use red as a symbol. Instead they use purple, as is symbolized by Qatar, a small country that is courageous enough despite the fact that at present, it is ostracized by other Middle East countries. In other words, courage is more than just a flag. It is in contrast to its neighboring country, which is Bahrain which uses red as its flag but for a different purpose. Bahrain’s red flag symbolizes the Persian Sea. In addition, Saudi Arabia provides a different case. The country does not use red as symbol of courage; instead it uses swords to symbolize their courage.

There are also countries that imply courage but articulate it in a different way. Although using red, Kuwait considers that their courage is best symbolized by the sword in their flag. The
country with the capital of Kuwait City has proven their courage when it will be annexed by Iraq in 1991.

In addition to symbolizing courage, the red color is used by the two countries in the Middle East to imply ashabiyah (group fanaticism politics). The Palestinians use red as a symbol of the Kharijite group despite much controversy over the political faction in the days of al-Khulafa al-Rashidun. The Jordanian, whose flag is almost identical to the Palestinians, identifies red with the Hashemite dynasty.

Despite the fact that not all countries are based on Islamic principles, at least 60% of the nations in the Middle East still appreciate this religion. This is evidenced by the fact that as many as 12 countries symbolize Islam in their flags. The symbols of Islam are highlighted in the form of star moon (Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Turkey), only stars (Morocco and Jordan), green (Algeria, Saudi Arabia, and Iran), five serrations showing the pillars of Islam (Bahrain) Tawhid (Saudi Arabia), lafadz Takbir (Iraq and Iran), the black color representing rayah (Palestine and Jordanian), as well as the identical white of the liwa (Palestine and Jordan).

However, not all green colors are identified with Islam. A good example is Oman. Muscat makes green as a symbol of the fertility of the soil. This step is followed by Kuwait which also symbolizes green for fertile soil. The secondary color which is a combination of yellow and blue chosen by Palestine to symbolize the Fatimid dynasty that once prevailed in Egypt.

A total of 15% of countries were still trapped with the nostalgia of the glory of Ottoman Empire. This is evidenced by 3 countries that use crescent symbols and stars like the Turkish flag. They include Algeria, Tunisia and Libya. The three countries were once the territory of Istanbul. However, it is necessary to highlight that the crescent and the star are more accurately referred to Turkey instead of Islam. It is because the flag of Islam is represented by the phrase of Tawheed. Even Libya who originally had a plain green flag after the revolution changed their flag as that before Muammar Qaddafi led them which feature a crescent moon and stars.

Of these, fifty-five percent of countries in the Middle East region put great importance on peace, sanctity, fertility, and optimism. This is evidenced by the use of white color in their flags. Those eleven countries include Algeria, Tunisia, Oman, Egypt, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Iraq, Iran, Yemen, and Syria. This is of course a good thing considering that the Middle East region is very vulnerable to conflict (Ibrahim, 2016: 19). It also reinforces that the Middle East countries desperately want peace, just like the Islamic religion mission as Rahmatan li al-'Alamin.

There are at least 30% of countries in the Middle East who were unable to forget the darkness or hardship of the past. This is evidenced by the existence of six countries that use black as a symbol of darkness. They include Libya, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Iraq and Yemen. Furthermore, Kuwait identified black more as a war that is also associated with the darkness. Therefore, it is impossible for a nation to regard the battle as a glory. It must be the opposite, the era of darkness.

Seeing the darkness of the past is a necessity, because it surely will lead to fruitful lesson. Lesson learned is that there are always positive values out of the negative event. This is in accordance with the Quran of al-Hashr verse 18.

يَـ ٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِيهَ ءَامَىُىا۟ ٱتَّقُىا۟ ٱللَََّّ وَلْتَىظُرْ وَفْس ٌۭ مَّا قَدَّمَتْ لِغَد
ۖ    إِنَّ ٱللَََّّ خَبِير   بِمَا تَعْمَلُىنَ
That is to say, "O you who believe, be devoted to God, and let each soul see what happened in the past for the future. And be devoted to God. Allah is Knower of what you do."

Black is actually also used by Palestinians and Jordanians. However, these neighboring countries interpreted that the dark color symbolizes rayah. Both countries are always of the same views because initially Palestine and Jordan belong to one country. However, due to various conflicts of interest, these countries take their own way. These two countries even have different political attitudes toward Israeli occupation. Amman tends to be permissive, while Ramallah is resistant since their territory gradually diminish due to Israeli Zionism.

As many as 45% of Middle Eastern countries tend to carry ethnic sentiments of Pan-Arabism with them. This is evident in nine countries that use Arab or Arab Union resistance battles. Although the designated style is not exactly the same, the composition is almost the same and altogether show the spirit when the Arabs try to get away from the grip of Ottoman. They include Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, and Libya. Even some countries such as Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and Yemen’s flags are of the same basic color, which is Red, white, and black. This famous Arab resistance flag began to be used in 1916.

This sounds so natural because long before the birth of Islam, the Arabs were notoriously fanatic with their tribes. Even today there is still an Arab society that says, "نحن عربيا قبل أن نكو إسلاميا" (We were Arabs before we became Muslims.) This ashabiyah politics is always a concern for Ibn Khaldun in defining Arabs.

An interesting fact to note from these Middle East countries is that the Arabic-flagged countries are only those who are ethnically of Arabic native. It means there is no mixture or combination with other nations. Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia are also equally Arabs. However, they are blended from three mixes that is of Arab, Barber and Bedouin. The Arabic language used by Rabat, Algiers, and Tunis is different from the spoken speech of Arab society in Arabia Peninsula and Maghreb al-Adna public.
The Arab ethnic proximity is not only indicated by the Pan-Arab flags alone. It is also indicated by the presence of green stars in some countries such as Iraq and Syria. Damascus uses two green stars as a symbol of their friendship with Egypt called Arab Republic. While Baghdad listed three green stars as a marker of intimacy between Egypt, Iraq and Syria framed in the Arab

Figure 1. Pan-Arabism in Arab Republic of Egypt flag fly at Port Said (Taken by Shubhi Mahmashony Harimurti 2012).
Union. However, now the meaning of three green stars in the flag of Iraq has been replaced since the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime (Cahyaningtyas, 2007: vii).

Those eight countries are not only ethnically fanatics but also nationally chauvinistic. This is evidenced by the inclusion of a distinctive state emblem which is not found anywhere else in the world. Forty percent of the total Middle Eastern countries put forward state sentiment in their flags. Among others are Egyptians (Nasser bird), Saudi Arabia (sword), Oman, Israel (David star), Jordan (Hasyimiyah star), Turkey (crescent and star), Lebanon (Cedar tree), and Iran (Kufi Takbir) (al-Lail, 1418 H: 240).

Not surprisingly, even though they are of the Arab fellows, they are prone to conflict because each country may have different interests from each other. The Saudi Arabia conflict with Yemen in 2016 and the Gulf II war involving Iraq versus Kuwait in 1989 is a testimony to the fact that it is almost impossible for the modern Arabs to unite despite the fact that they are of the same ethnic. In other words, the interests of the country are far above everything else.

A noteworthy script writing on Egyptian walls by the side of the road even reads, "مصر أولى" (Egypt is the first). This indicates that the Egyptians are always being indoctrinated to prioritize their country. Some even say, "إسلام ثانيا، عرب ثالثا، مصر أولا" (Egypt is first, second is Arab, and third is Islam). So, it is not surprising that according to history, Egypt is a highly chauvinistic state. They do not care if they are to dispute with other Arabs and their fellow Muslims. The 1979 Camp David agreement is a noteworthy example of this tendency. When a peace agreement is made by Anwar Sadat (the president of Egypt), Simon Peres (President of Israel), and John Kennedy (President of the United States) in a room called Camp David in the White House compound, Washington actually hurt the struggle of other Arabs especially Palestine which is still controlled by Tel Aviv. The proof is the murder of Anwar Sadat in Nasr City, Cairo on October 6, 1981 while leading the anniversary of Egypt’s victory over Israel 8 years earlier. Some people think that Egypt is only willing to fight for the sake of the country only when it frees the Sinai Peninsula. They do not want to do that for Arabs, let alone Islam. It is in contrast to the fact that Egypt has an Arab Union flag and that 90% of its people adhere to the teachings brought by the Prophet Muhammad.

Of the 20 Middle East countries, it is only Israel whose flag symbol does not bear any resemblances with other countries or at least contains similar meaning. The existence of the Zionist state is indeed considered strange. Out of the blue, there stood the state of Israel amid the settlements of Palestinian society on May 14, 1948 (Haikal, 2008: 300). Their territory was expanded in line with a series of victories gained mainly in the battles of 1956 and 1967. With the victory of war in 1967 the territory of Israel could seize the territorial law of the Arab Republic of Egypt and the Syrian Socialist Arab Republic (al-Jamsiy, 1977: 19). Israel is under siege by Arab countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Jordan, and Iraq but does not make the Jewish state down to its knees (Qaradhawi, 1997: 19). It is primarily because England and the United States stood behind the Israeli. The existence of Israel in the Middle East indeed disrupts the political, social, religious, cultural, and even dynamical conditions of the flag.
CONCLUSION

The history of the flags of Middle Eastern countries has always been dynamic. Most of the flags changed according to the corresponding political turmoil at that time. Some of them are Libya which changed their flag twice because of the Green Revolution by Muammar Gadhafi and Arab Spring in 2011. Egypt also replace their flag during the July 26th, 1952 Revolution owing to the change from monarchy to republic.

In a similar vein, Kuwait also changed their flags in 1961. In addition, the Palestinians also change their flag for several times, mainly because it is the only country that is still being colonized and has not gained its sovereignty. Thus, it seems that they are still looking for the right ideology to express and symbolize in their own flag.

The Turks changed their flags during the collapse of the Ottoman Empire as Mustafa Kamal Atatürk took over it in 1924. Iraq, even reform its flag for five times since they highly depend on local political conditions. The last flag used today is the flag that was inaugurated in 2004 after the downfall of Saddam Hussein (Syahih, 2007: 149).

Modern Iran recorded one time flag change on the Islamic Revolution of February 11th 1979 which altered the nation from monarchy to republic. Yemen also does the same during the unification of the Yemeni Arab Republic and the Democratic People's Republic of Yemen in 1990 since each has its own flag.

Once held by Hafidh al-Assad, the Syrian Arab Republic changed its flag. There is a chance that the flag of the country formerly known as Shams to change provided that the government of Bashar al-Assad can be overthrown. It is due to the fact that until to date, the Arab Spring is still highly influencing Syria. No wonder that the opposing party has often used a counter-flag.

As seen from Vexillology perspective, it is possible to say that the policy of the Middle Eastern countries mostly prioritizes the solidarity between fellow Muslims. They also declare themselves as courageous people with sharp vision towards the future. Despite the frequent conflict between neighboring countries, the Middle East countries are craving for peace. This proves that disagreements are not really what they want. Despite the fact that they are divided into many countries, the Arabs are yearning for unity.

REFERENCES

