Sects and Ethnic Minorities in Syria

Written by Asma Alghoul

Part of a series of research papers entitled
"Syria and its people"

Produced by Sharq
in partnership with
the Konrad Adenauer Foundation

Sects and Ethnic Minorities in Syria

Written by Asma Alghoul

Translated and edited by Jenine Abboushi

Part of a series of research papers entitled
"Syria and its people"

Produced by Sharq
in partnership with
the Konrad Adenauer Foundation

“Syria and its people”

A series of research papers about life in Syria prior to 2011
Produced by Sharq in partnership with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation

We at Sharq have in recent years interviewed Syrians from diverse socio-economic, religious, ethnic and geographic backgrounds about their lives in Syria prior to 2011. Each interview focuses on a specific topic in which the narrator has experience, and all provide detailed personal accounts of life as a Syrian in a particular community and town living under particular pressures and privileges.

Listening to the individual stories, it becomes apparent that certain problems impacted Syrians across the country, regardless of ethnicity, religion, class or location and that these stories, collectively, add insight into the difficulties Syrians faced in the decades leading up to the 2011 revolution.

It would serve the future leaders of Syria, and agencies and organisations concerned with the development of the country post-conflict, to consider the lessons presented through these collective stories and experiences to ensure the development of a peaceful and prosperous society.

This is the motivation behind this book, this collection of studies on six interrelated spheres, each of which was written following a review of over 120 personal stories and a study of existing research. Despite the massive destruction, the country is not going to be built on a blank canvas. Its people and diverse communities carry with them fond memories, valuable experiences and crucial knowledge that if heard, nurtured and shared can provide the foundation needed for rebuilding a strong and inclusive Syria.

The ongoing conflict has resulted in the destruction of much of the country and many aspects of its society, but warm memories and relationships abound. When looking to rebuild, be it physical structures, institutions, programmes or communities, looking to Syria’s past should inform design for the future. It is not enough to only understand the experience of Syrians during the conflict, but also to know about their lives, loves and concerns prior to it.

Peaceful coexistence and post-conflict development require above all else empathy and understanding of the other. Effective and constructive development in our understanding of the causes and impact of different actions, events and environments on individuals and communities pre-conflict is key to our ability to develop approaches that can both help end conflict and build sustainably peaceful communities.

For decades, Syrians were denied the opportunity to honestly and constructively share their experiences, their dreams and their concerns. As such, we must focus on building trust based on a unifying desire to build a harmonious and inclusive society. Such trust can be built through storytelling. The telling of and listening to individual people’s stories of struggle and success, woes and wonders, nurtures connections and helps build stronger communities based on empathy, acceptance and respect.

Reem Maghribi
Managing Director, Sharq.Org

You can read and listen to the interviews referenced in this paper at www.SyrianHistories.org

Sects and Ethnic Minorities in Syria
A Balance of Fear and Interests

Written by Asma Ghoul
Produced by Sharq.Org, 2018

Introduction and Summary

When we talk about an ethnic minority in Syria, we are talking about a sect. When we talk about an ethnic group or minority, we are also talking about an economic class and a geographic area. Hence it seems impossible to isolate the sectarian, ethnic, tribal or economic categories when they overlap so tightly, as they look like a single indivisible unit. Syria is very diverse regarding social class, sects and ethnicities, both in daily life and in print, in references and sources concerning the Syrian situation and history.

This study carefully follows the paradigms of religious communities and ethnic minorities to challenge Syria's official historical narrative. We also study how Syrian administrations and authorities have been the constant nemeses of these sects and ethnic groups.

Through historical analysis, this study seeks to understand the crux of conflict, and also ends by focusing on the present through living testimonies of Syrian citizens.

The paper is divided into three chapters. The first presents sects and ethnicities in Syria and their histories and demographic representations. The second studies the historical exploitation of ethnic communities and minorities from the time of the Ottoman occupation, through the French mandate, and finally during the Ba'athist and Assadist era. This chapter also discusses the characteristics of Ba'athist rule; on the one hand, its politics of division, slogans and favouritism, and on the other, the spread of fear and tyranny, which serves as the only cohesive force uniting diverse communities. The third chapter, through the use of testimonies, focuses on sectarianism, social harmony and dialogue. These citizen testimonies discuss, in the words of concerned men and women, the terms of coexistence, cultural formation, and the activities of these communities and ethnic minorities.

Preface

The definition of "community" is puzzling. There are those who see it as a homogeneous group that follows a specific religion or sect, and there are others who see it as a part of history. There are those who see an ethnic minority as a group with an independent tradition and identity. The definition does not hold when compared with the definition of a minority in modern times. So how do we determine when a minority is a minority, whether religious or ethnic? Is it only a matter of the ratio of the population to the number of those belonging to a particular category, or is it determined by the number of rights denied? Sometimes the minority behaves with majority-like characteristics, while the majority practices a series of daily nonconformities that make them almost a minority. Context is what determines the matter, and in our case this context is tyranny.[1]

In reading the history of minorities in the Arab world, whether ethnic or religious, it becomes clear that minorities do not fall under the category of "minorities" unless in conflict with those in power, and allied either with or in opposition to political parties and the army.

When we talk about power struggles, these are not limited to clans or clergy. We are talking about reorganizing social relationships, about how each person feels about his or her identity and the identity of the other: strange, familiar, belonging, deserving, hated, ostracized, disgraceful?[2]

If we focus on concrete rather than general examples, we could, for instance, look at the current Sunni majority in Syria, which exceeds 70% of the country's population. The Sunni are subject to systematic violations that make them a minority, at least regarding the denial of their rights. However, if we look at the Alawi religious minority and its significant representation in the security services and the concrete practices of these forces, then the Alawi function as a majority, in this sense.

This reversal is what is happening in the case of Syria, whose system depends on strong influence, repression and wealth. The Alawite community had to move from the countryside to the city and from the oppressed to the power-holders. The poor became rich, and the minority became a majority even though demographically the largest population in Syria is Sunni, despite the recent significant impositions on this group.

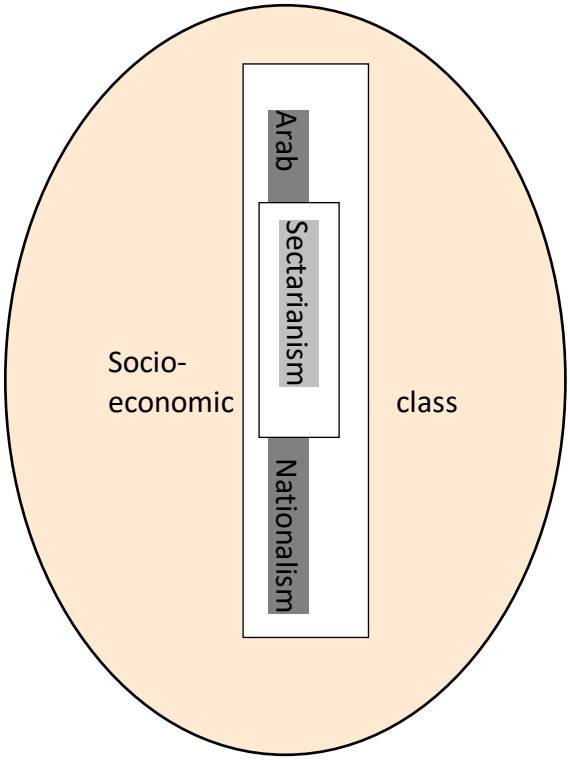
The relationship was reversed completely only a few decades ago. Whereas previously the Alawites felt marginalized and forgotten in the countryside while the bourgeois Sunnis occupied powerful positions and state centres, the Alawites now seem to have turned the tables.

In Syria, ethnic minorities belong to other religious groups and economic classes. The majority of Kurds, Turkomans and Circassians are Sunni, while all Armenians are Christians. Thus the Armenians are both an ethnic and a religious minority.

In his book *The Struggle for Power in Syria*, Nicholas van Dam writes:
"Sectarian, regional and tribal groups may, in turn, be partly intertwined with socio-economic groups: one belongs to a particular social class, a religious community or a clan and is a resident of a certain area at the same time. There is a great disparity between categories such

as religious communities and socio-economic classes. Socio-economic class is a horizontal social class and certain socio-economic characteristics apply to its members, whereas religious communities usually include layers that are somehow divided vertically."[3]

We illustrate Van Dame's concept in a diagram that shows the circles of containment of communities and minorities in Syria. We added ethnic nationalities to it.



The oval representing socio-economic and political class interests will continue to grow and generally consume sectarian, ethnic and national loyalties. These loyalties can also be channelled and preserved through struggles between certain economic classes and sects.[4]

Sects in Syria have always been more inclined than ethnic minorities to struggle for power. Sects are blocs of ethnic nationalism that are more cohesive in terms of their alliances and, thus, are harder to dissolve. The authorities also prefer to play on religious feelings as this is more sensitive compared to ethnic identity.

Although ethnic minorities are culturally and nationally complex, religious communities have more conservative bonds than the ostensibly diminishing ethnic minorities of various cultures and languages.

Chapter One: Mosaic Sects and Ethnicities in Syria

In February 2012, the People's Assembly passed the Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic, which was issued by the current Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad in Decree No. 94/2012, and published in the Official Gazette. Its third article states that Islamic jurisprudence is a significant source of state legislation.[5]

Syria is one of the richest countries in the region regarding the plurality of religious denominations, whether Muslim, Christian or other religions and beliefs. When we also consider ethnic communities, Syria forms a kind of coloured mosaic sustained for hundreds of years, altering only in numbers and percentages.

Researchers' estimations of the percentage of each sect in Syria are uncertain because of the lack of statistics. We will rely on the latest official census of 1985 to identify ethnic population percentages in Syrian society.[6] According to the *Network of the Syrian Revolution*, the last population statistics determined for each sect, as well as the number of sects, was in 1943, when the French conducted a detailed and comprehensive census of all communities in Syria. The network explained that the 1981 census had adopted the earlier sectarian census, and that this estimate was based on the growth rate of the national and sectarian populations in each governorate.[7]

"It is also not easy to get accurate statistics on the census of the various religious communities in Syria because of the sensitivity of the Shiite regime to questions of this kind," said Khalid Sindawi, one of the few specializing in Shiite literature.[8]

From all recent and informal statistics, including those on the CIA page,[9] the best are those conducted by the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies entitled "Evolving Syria and Demographic Change." We will further elaborate on this study in an attempt to adjust population estimates of ethnic and sectarian minorities in the Syrian provinces.

Religious Communities:

1. Ismailis

The Ismailis are one of the Shiite sects and the second largest after the Twelfth Division. They concur with the majority of Muslims in the belief of the unity of God and the prophecy of Muhammad and the inspired transmission of the Koran. However, they disagree that the Koran confirms that visceral meaning underlies that which is evident, and so they name their Sunni rivals as well as some of the Shiites the "batiniyoun" (the intuitive ones). The Ismaili current in Shiite thought expresses the mystical and Sufi outlook that concerns the nature of God, creation and the struggle of the soul, whereas the more literal Twelve are focused on the Shariah, the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad, and the twelve imams of his household as beacons to the path of God.[10]

The city of Salamiyah, located thirty kilometres from Hama in the centre of Syria is the capital of the Ismaili community in Syria and the Middle East generally.[11] The percentage of Ismailis is 1% of all Muslims.[12]

2. Shiites or Shiite Twelvers

The second largest sect of Muslims in Syria after the Sunnis is the Shiites, who believe according to holy scripture, Ali bin Abi Talib and his descendants by his wife Fatima, daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, are imams to be followed and obeyed, and are the authorities for Muslims following the death the Prophet.[13]

The roots of Shiism in Syria developed in the first century AH with the strife between Ali and Maawiya. Shiism then spread in the fourth century AH with the emergence of the Hamdaniyah state in Aleppo, and then with the rise of the Fatimid rule, which tried to spread Shiism in Syria, especially in Damascus. The Ayyubids fought Shiism throughout the reign of the Ottoman Empire until the Shiites become a small minority limited to certain areas.[14] Syria has a 0.4% share, and the majority of Shiites in Syria came seeking a haven from Iraq after the Gulf wars.[15]

The most prominent Shiite areas in Syria are Damascus, Zine El Abidine, Joura and El Amin. The Al-Amin neighbourhood is considered the most important centre for Shiites in Syria. It has two mosques: the Imam Ali bin Abi Talib Mosque, and the Mosque of Zahra.[16]

3. The Nasiriya or Alawite Sect

The Alawites are a group of Shiites. They have the same sequence of the twelve imams but they diverge over the last imam concerning the sources of leadership and other issues.[17]

The Alawites emerged in the third century of the Hijra. The sect continued to spread into the state of Hamdania and they had two centres, one in Aleppo and the other in Baghdad. However, after the Hulaku campaign, the centre moved to Lattakia. The Alawites remained in the successive Islamic countries, replacing conflict and battles in the Ottoman occupation and the French mandate.[18] The Alawite community constitutes up to 11.5% of the total population.[19] Alawites in Syria live mainly in the coastal mountains, and in the governorates of Homs, Hama, Damascus, Horan and Alexandria.[20]

4. The Druze

The Druze are a religious sect with followers in Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan and Syria. In the ninth century AH, the Druze were subjected to the so-called plight of the Fatimid state, especially in Aleppo and Antioch. Their strife led them to migrate towards Jabal Al-Arab in the Golan, which has since become a Druze stronghold and remains so today. The Great Arab Revolution was sparked under Druze leader Sultan Pasha al-Atrash during the French mandate of Syria.[21]

The Druze constitute a large proportion of the population of the Golan occupied by Israel today. There are more than 40,000 Druze in the city of Sweida, and in the town of Jaramana, southeast of Damascus.[22] 3% of the population of Syria is Druze.[23]

5. Yezidis or Yazidis

Yazidis are followers of a religion of ancient origins in the Middle East. Most live near Mosul and the Sinjar region of Iraq. Smaller groups live in Turkey, Syria, Iran, Georgia and Armenia. Ethnically, they are of Kurdish origin of Indo-European descent with Arab, Assyrian and Syriac cultural influences.[24]

6. Sunnis

The Sunnis, "the people and community of the Sunna," constitute the largest population segment, representing 76.1% of the total. The Sunni majority is concentrated in the central governorates: Damascus, Homs, Hama, Aleppo, Raqqa and Daraa.[25]

Islam entered Syria in 636 A.D. peacefully and with no killing under the reign of Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab, via Khalid ibn al-Waleed and Abu Ubaida ibn al-Jarrah. This peaceful takeover was because the people of the Levant desired to get rid of the oppression and tyranny of the Byzantine state. Islam spread in the Rashidi era to the major cities. The countryside and the great tribes remained Christian for an extended period.

In the Umayyad era, Damascus became the capital of the Umayyad state, which led to its economic and urban prosperity. Many of the mosques were reconstructed and inhabited by a large number of companions and followers. However, tribal differences that would arise between the Qaysiyah and Yemenites in Homs and Damascus weakened the state and abetted the establishment of the Abbasid state with its capital in Baghdad.

In the Abbasid period, the other sects (Alawite, Druze, Ismaili) began to emerge and concentrated in Syria until the era of the Mamluks, who cared only about Damascus and not the rest of Syria.[26]

7. Christians

The Syrian Christians are one of the earliest peoples to convert to Christianity. The Arameans and some Arab tribes residing in Syria, an important centre of the Christian religion, adopted Christianity. There are dozens of monasteries, churches and holy sites of Christian history in Syria.

Christians live throughout the Syrian Republic, particularly in some important regions such as Bab Touma, a Christian neighbourhood in the Old City of Damascus. The number of Christians in Homs, Lattakia and the island of Euphrates increased through two migrations: the emigration of the Armenians and that of the Assyrians. Their number has declined since the middle of the twentieth century due to local and regional conditions.[27]

Syria has Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant Christians, and the total number of Christians account for 4.5% of Syria's population.[28]

The Christians of Syria are defined according to their ethnic nationality and church. There are Roman Orthodox, Roman Catholics, Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholics, Catholic Chaldeans, Armenian Orthodox, Armenian Catholics, Maronites, Protestants and Latins.[29]

8. Jews

Their presence in Syria dates back to antiquity. Some biblical accounts mention the existence of Jews since the time of the Prophet David, and their number increased in the sixteenth century as a result of their expulsion from Andalusia.

The most significant historical gatherings of Jews were in Damascus, Aleppo and Qamishli, and smaller numbers lived in Nisibin and Lattakia. From the Islamic conquest until the Ottoman era the presence of the Jews in Syria was not affected. Their areas and places of worship remained in Damascus, a region near the fortress in Aleppo, and they had a presence in Jubar in the countryside of Damascus. Their situation remained stable until the Nakba (Israeli occupation of Palestine) in 1948.

In 1948, hostility intensified against the Jews, leading to the migration of a large number of them to Palestine. After the war in 1967, the regime issued many restrictive laws against them, which prevented them from traveling, taking public posts etc., and which led to an increase in illegal emigration until 1992.[30] After this, President Hafez al-Assad lifted the travel ban and allowed them to leave. The majority of them emigrated. The statistics indicate that very few remain, exclusively in Aleppo and Damascus, and their number is in the hundreds.[31]

Ethnic minorities in Syria:

1. Armenians

Their presence is concentrated in the city of Aleppo, the Latakia countryside, and the city of Qamishli in north-eastern Syria. They are the descendants of the Armenians who fled the massacres during the Ottoman Empire in the First World War. Syria and the surrounding areas have always formed a haven from war and persecution, especially since Aleppo was an important centre for the Armenian pilgrims going to Jerusalem.[32]

The Church plays a vital role in uniting them and the vast majority are Christian. The number of Armenians in Syria has declined in the last 20 years after more than 3,000 Armenian Syrians left for Armenia.[33]

2. Assyrians / Chaldeans

They are descended from several ancient civilizations in the East, the primary Assyrian and Aramaic civilization. They are considered to be the earliest people who to convert to Christianity. Ecclesiastical divisions led them to secede to Assyrians, Chaldeans and Western Syriacs, and language differences also emerged. Their numbers decreased because of massacres under Tamerlane in the 14th century, Badr Khan at the beginning of the 19th century, and more Assyrian killings on the eve of the First World War. The second half of the twentieth century saw the migration of many of them to Europe and America. The Iraq war in

2003 led to a significant reduction in their numbers in Iraq and increases in Syria. They are present in the far north-east of Syria in the city of Qamishli and its villages, as well as in Aleppo and Damascus.[34] They make up about a third of Syria's Christians, most of whom follow the Syriac Orthodox Church.[35]

3. The Kurds

The majority of the Kurds live in "Kurdistan," a territory spread between Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Their language is Kurdish. The majority of them are Sunni Muslims and there are Shiites and members of religions other than Islam such as Yezidi, Persian, Judaism and Christianity. The estimated number of Kurds around the world is about 30 million, most of them living in Kurdistan. There are Kurds who have left their country and live in the diaspora because of constant persecution. Every time they demand their national independence, they are subjected to violence and injustice.[36]

The Kurds live in the north-eastern areas of Syria bordering Iraq and Turkey, especially in the provinces of Hasaka and Qamishli, and in the countryside to the north of Aleppo. They range from 10% to 15% of the total population of Syria. Successive Syrian governments have discriminated against the Kurds for fear of being forced to secede territory to this group, and thousands of them have been denied access to Syrian citizenship following a law enacted in the early 1960s.[37]

President Bashar al-Assad issued Decree No. 49 of 2011 (after the Syrian revolution) granting Syrian citizenship to foreigners registered in the Hasaka records, and tens of thousands of Syrian Kurds were settled within days.[38]

4. Turkmen

Their origins date back to the Turkish families who came to Syria with the Seljuks and then the Mamluks, as well as Turkish tribes settled by the Ottomans in the countryside to alleviate the presence of clans dependent on grazing[39]. A majority of the Turkmen live in Turkmenistan, in north-eastern Iran, northwest Afghanistan and other regions. They speak a dialect called Turkmen.[40]

The Turkmen live in Syria between villages and cities, and the most important settlements are in Aleppo, Damascus, Lattakia and Homs, where there is a door called the Door of Turkmen. In Damascus, there is a neighbourhood "Saruja" named after the strict religion of the Turkish Mamluk commander. In Aleppo, Turkmen concentrate in the northern villages of the city. Turkmen in Syria live in Turkmen towns and villages, and they make up 3% of the population of Syria. They are Sunni Muslims.[41]

5. The Caucasian minority

A. The Dagestanis: Dagestan was one of the self-governing republics of the Russian Federation. It was also part of the Rān, which was part of a larger region that was named by the Arab historians and geographers (Al-Rehab) and included Armenia and Azerbaijan. Dagestan, which lies in the center of the Caucasus region, is bordered in the south and south-

west by the former Soviet republics of Azerbaijan and Georgia, and in the west and north by the Republic of Chechnya, the province of Stavropol and the Republic of Kalmykia.[42]

Its history includes long wars, which led to the migration of its population and settlement in Islamic and Arab countries, including Syria where they arrived during the Ottoman Empire. The majority are Sunni Muslims. They live in areas with the presence of other Caucasian minorities, especially in the province of Homs.

B. Chechnyans: They are an ethnic minority that came to Syria from the Republic of Chechnya, which is located in the northern Caucasus in the Russian Federation. This area contains self-governing republics such as Chechnya, Dagestan and Adige.[43]

The members of this minority came to Syria between 1878-90 after forced displacement under Tsarist Russia following the 100-year war. They settled in specific areas, especially the city of Ras al-Ain in the province of Hasaka, and Quneitra in the Golan Heights. The latter had an old Khan used by the Ottomans and travellers to Palestine. They chose it because it resembled the landscapes of their ancestral land. They were accompanied by the people of Adyghe (Circassians). They lived in their homes of black stone, which is naturally abundant in the volcanic land, and of red brick, which was distinctive to the Arab world. They also managed to establish modern farms and build stables for their horses and cows, taking advantage of past experience. Chechnya thus founded the Dagestan district. In the Chechen language, Dagest refers to the land of the ancestors. It became known as the Dagestan district. Their Adige neighbours did the same, and founded the Circassian Quarter and built the Circassian Mosque, which was the nucleus of the city of Quneitra.[44]

The Circassians are a group of inhabitants of the North Caucasus who fled as a result of the expansionist wars waged by the Russian Empire in the region. They are the oldest nation known to have inhabited the North Caucasus. They mixed with other people, producing language differences among them, and most of them rejected Islam.[45]

Circassians emigrated from their country to the Ottoman Empire in the Caucasus at the end of the 17th century because of the Russians threatened them with death, transfer or resettlement in mass camps. However, a number of them had been in Syria b previously as soldiers or commanders of armies of the Mamluk state.[46]

Most of them settled in the Golan Heights in several villages around the main cities. They established some of the central neighbourhoods in the cities, such as the immigrants' neighbourhood in Damascus and the Circassian Quarter in Jibla.[47] They are estimated to be 150,000 people in total.[48]

Approximate statistics:

The King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies recently published a study in comparative statistics entitled "The Merit of Syria and Demographic Change." The study concerned old statistics, which had been periodically announced since the outbreak of the Syrian revolution in March 2011, on the number of displaced people and fatalities in Syria. The study showed that with the use of the phrase "the merit of Syria", President Bashar al-Assad was referring to specific regions and governorates in the beginning of 2016, including the provinces of Lattakia and Tartous, parts of the provinces of Homs and Hama, and

Damascus and its countryside, and indicated that he and his supporters would defend them with all their might. He considered the other regions and governorates of Syria less strategic - at least at that time.[49]

The study indicated that there was a significant demographic change due to displacement outside certain provinces, refugees in others, and conversions to Shiism. A policy was in effect of granting Syrian citizenship to Shiites and Alawites coming to Syria from Iraq, Lebanon, Turkey and other countries. In addition to this was the numbers of dead, and the refugees fleeing to countries outside Syria.

The results of this demographic change in the population of the governorates ("the merit of Syria") was a decrease of 22% in the population of Syria from 9,826,000 people at the end of 2011 to 7,625,000 at the end of 2016.

The Sunni population declined by 17%, from 6,802,000 to 3,950,000, and the Shiite population increased by 12%, from 92,000 to 1,016,000.

The large decline in the Sunni population led to a decrease in the total population in the ("merit of Syria") governorates and impacted all sects and religions. The percentage of Alawites rose from 21% to 24%, Christians from 6% to 7%, Ismailis from 2% to 3%, while the percentage of Druze remained unchanged at 1%.[50]

And the biggest question here is: how did all these communities and minorities emerge in Syria, and then manage to remain throughout these years?

In his book *The Struggle for Power in Syria*, Nicholas Van Dam argues that this is due to several factors, the most important of which is that the three major monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, originate from a larger region that includes Syria and the Fertile Crescent. In the past, there were invasions by various groups such as Arabs, Kurds, Mongols and Turks, and this region had always been a centre of tribal and other movements.

Van Dam also explains that the Middle East has, in the past, also been a refuge from neighbouring regions for the politically or religiously persecuted. These refugee groups have been able to settle in Syria or surrounding areas. The tribal and national differences resulting from these developments have often taken on a religious character and contributed to the emergence of communities of religious differences. It was, therefore, natural for political and religious differences to develop as part of this process. "Religious, tribal and linguistic differences, which gained strength in local contexts, have been often preserved, resulting in intense local loyalty, concentrated in specific areas."

Van Dam also believes that geographical formation, particularly in the remote regions of Lattakia and the Jabal Druze mountains and valleys, contributed to maintaining the strength and independence of these cultures, nationalities and religious groups, especially with lack of communication between the regions and the absence of a strong central authority.

Finally, the relative tolerance shown by Islam to Christians and Jews allowed for the encouragement and growth of religious and ethnic differences.[51]

Chapter Two: The Historical Exploitation of Ethnicities and Sects in Syria

There is a structural link between sectarianism and politics in most Middle Eastern countries, not only in Syria, and this link is not theoretical but concrete. This link is mainly due to the dominance of religious identity, which renders the civic and individual components of national identity vulnerable.

The emergence of this link in Syria is indeed not only due to recent events, which have only rendered it more visible in the media. This link has existed for decades, and no regime ruled Syria without taking into account ethnic sects and minorities in the application of policies and laws, in building state systems, and in forging political balances. Thus, sectarianism entered politics and society through the political conflict of two ethnic groups and continued through a long history beginning with the Ottoman occupation, continuing through the French mandate and the military coups, and finally ending with the rule of Assad. His regime long used the slogan of uniting different sects and races under Arab nationalism and "fighting the occupation" to efface differences and force the homogenization of cultural, ethnic and religious components. At the same time, he recouped sectarianism several times. He did not succeed in producing it, but he continued to promote its special interests separately from the nation to maintain his rule.

Assad learned well from his predecessors. They were keen to practice the trick of homogeneity while they re-formed sectarianism under their domination through quotas and gains and the use of religious dignitaries, priests and religious codes to manipulate these communities and sects.[52]

However, Assad went far in applying the historical experiences of his rule. Every time the regime faced an opposition, whatever the opposition, the regime portrayed it as a sectarian conflict. This portrayal robbed the resistance of its objectives, altering its course. Fearing that the goal of the opposition was to divide Syria into small states, the regime recalled the recent history of the French mandate, as well as Syrian national pride in the homogeneity of the country.

In this way, the regime succeeded in presenting every conflict as a sectarian one in the face of any opposition movement, even if it was a trade union. This is what happened with the revolution in 2011, which the regime categorized as "terrorist."

Hence, it appears that this exploitation of the sectarian and ethnic components was not the result of the moment, but of a policy sustained from the Ottoman Empire through the time of the French mandate to the establishment of the modern Syrian state.

This policy was applied as follows:

During the Ottoman Empire:

The struggle between the various religious communities of the Ottoman Empire or Ottoman occupation was an outcome of the early policies of the state through Sunni nepotism and allegations against sectarian minorities on the basis of religion. The latter were forced to hide

their religious rites, and thus they inherited a sense of injustice. Moreover, the colonial powers (France, England and Russia) intervened in state functioning under the pretext of protecting these minorities, which further fueled sectarian conflict.[53]

France claimed the right to protect Maronite Christians, especially in Lebanon, the Russian government claimed a similar right to protect Greek Orthodox Christians, and Britain had special relations with the Druze and the Jews. This protectionism earned these minorities and sects the hatred of the central Ottoman government and the majority Sunni Muslim population, which mostly consented to Ottoman rule. There were those who regarded the minorities protected by the West as potential traitors, sources of weakness, and a threat to the Empire.[54]

As a result, relations between Sunni and religious minorities worsened. The primary source of this discord was the effect of political intervention by foreign powers who buttressed these religious minorities as political entities, developing their collective consciousness.

At the time, there were significant violent conflicts such as the events of Aleppo of 1850, which started with an uprising instigated by the poor against the Ottoman tax and recruitment system. Ottoman forces then attacked the homes of the city's Muslim dignitaries and wealthy Christian neighbourhoods. Here, economic class triumphed over sectarian and national allegiance. Bedouins from outside the town targeted Christian areas, and the Ottoman administration sought to punish the perpetrators and contain the crisis so as not to leave room for further Western intervention. [55]

During the French mandate:

From 1920 to 1946, French Mandate authorities deliberately incited sectarian loyalties and ethnic nationalism to stifle the emergence of Arab nationalism. This policy also intended to encourage separatism and specialization among religious and national minorities by granting them autonomy in areas where they were the majority. Based on this policy, the Alawite majority held supreme rule in the region of Latakia, and in Mount Druze the Druze majority lived under their own control. The mandate granted these two autonomous regions the status of "cantons."

The territory of the island, where the Christian communities represented a significant number, and where the Kurds formed a local majority, did not receive official autonomy under the French mandate. Instead, they placed the area under direct French administration. The French also encouraged the Kurds' aspirations for independence. [56]

The French army recruited ethnic, sectarian, and nationalist troops to local units called the East Army to create the Chaldean and Assyrian, Alawite, Druze, Kurdish and Circassian forces. The French employed these local forces to protect the system and suppress internal opposition.[57]

Because these forces constituted a minority issue, their status increased resentment among Arabic-speaking Sunnis. The French policy of 'divide and rule,' when one tribal leader is set against the other, also deepened differences between religious and ethnic minorities.[58]

The entanglement created by France promoting its sectarian units in the military as an alternative authority to civilian rule, facilitated the formation of a military-sectarian regime in Syria in the 1960s. From its inception, the regime paralyzed the development of constitutional institutions, censoring newspapers and the media, and strengthening the role of security and intelligence services in public life.[59]

Post-Mandate:

The end of the French Mandate was supposed to be a moment when true nationalist sentiments emerged, and when the establishment of a uniform state was possible after intellectuals of different sects had succeeded in severing from Ottoman Empire. But this moment was compromised after two decades of French mandate rule which continued dividing Syria into states, despite heightened apprehensions. This let-down was a result of sustained French and Ottoman tactics of strengthening some sects at the expense of others, and of pitting minorities against one another.

Full nationalist sentiment was implausible for several reasons, and the most important was geographical isolation within Syria: urban and rural divides, poverty and lack of development, as well as the legacies of divisive mandate policies within the sectarian religious communities and nationalities.

The mandate left behind the army of the East and Syria's share of these forces was 17,000 men. Of these, only 7000 remained after dismantling discriminatory groups. Disputes and alliances started to emerge in the army with attempts to "make Sunni" its members, accompanied by an insistence on the dismantling of Kurdish influence, and the implementation of such policies against the Christians more than others.[60]

In the first coup d'état led by Husni al-Zayyim in March 1949, the Kurdish contingent emerged as the leadership of the army. There were more than 20 officers of Kurdish origin, and five of them were in the General Command. The sectarian component also had a strong presence the war council formed by Sami al-Hanawi after his coup against Husni al-Zayyim in August of the same year. Among the most prominent members of the Council were: Sami al-Hanawi (Kurdish), Col. Bahij Klaas (Christian), Col. Alamadin Qawas (Alawi), Lt. Col. Amin Abu Assaf (Druze), President Khalid Jada (Circassian), President Hassan al-Hakim (Ismaili) and President Mohamed Diab (Ismaili).[61] The military war continued until the unification with Egypt in 1958, which offered a way out of this distribution. And these military formations accepted the proposal of the Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser to separate the army from parties and politics. But as soon as the heads of these groups transferred to civilian locations, different sects, under Ba'ath leadership, regrouped against him.[62]

Specific political changes and events directly influenced the evolution of Syria. "Part of the Jewish population of Aleppo was displaced, left the city, and left Syria, and they were an economically vital and dynamic population that built significant ties to Europe. There were other significant events, like the 1956 or 1967 wars," said Syrian political activist Samir al-Nashar, who was born in 1945.

The reasons for this departure, al-Nashar states, are as follows: "The socialist decisions starting under Abdel Nasser, the laws of nationalization that confiscated mills and factories,

and the implementation of agrarian reform, caused significant numbers of Christians and rich Sunni Muslims from Aleppo to head to Lebanon."

"After the arrival of Nasser in 1958 and the alliance with Egypt began to weaken, particularly the owners of factories and bourgeois industrial class, very active in the city of Aleppo, emigrated to Lebanon, Egypt, and the Arab Maghreb. This emigration continues to weaken the city economically."[63]

The Beginnings of the Ba'ath Party:

In the same way, for young people, the Ba'ath party was a substitute for the chaos of the political situation and the struggle between various powers. Socialist principles helped the party take root in villages and deprived rural areas, unlike in the big cities, where local merchants and the bourgeoisie controlled politics. Since religious minorities were concentrated in rural areas and most of the population of major cities was Sunni, it was logical that minority members controlled the Ba'ath Party. The non-religious character of Arab nationalism in the Ba'ath Party contributed to the relatively strong representation of members of ethnic and religious minorities. [64]

The rising popularity of the Ba'ath Socialist Party gave it impetus to carry out a coup in 1963 and gain power but this did not mean that the entire nationalist wing united under one banner. By 1963, the sectarian rhetoric of the Sunnis became public in the army, and key Sunni generals were discharged. The Alawites, Druze and Ismailis were disproportionately represented in the military compared to the general population, and they received distinctions of rank and promotions. [65]

Sunnis were discriminated against as they entered the military college, and in the movement of Sunni officers within the armed forces. The officers who were "trusted", because of their common sectarian ties with military leaders, usually controlled the politically and strategically important sectors of the army, and dismissed the Sunnis as "unreliable," or likely to be unreliable, and transferred them to the Syrian-Israeli front, or to Aleppo or Latakia. [66]

The policy of sectarian military movements within the army units stationed around Damascus led to the control of minority members, while there was strong Sunni representation in specific units of the army further away from the capital. The sectarian and ethnic choices concerned not only the appointment of officers in higher military posts but also in the selection of lower-ranking soldiers.[67]

Although these conflicts were fierce in the army, the general public was not aware of this. These struggles were not directly reflected on the Streets of Syria. The civilian population lived an austere life, not because of religion or politics but because of the severity of daily life, and there was no need for rhetoric of any kind.

Regarding co-existence, Ahmed Abdel-Al, born in 1954, says: "We had a house in the Qaimriya area of Damascus, a plural neighbourhood with Druze, Christian and Muslim communities, and there was also a large number of Jews." About his neighbourhood memories he says, "their clothes were as ordinary as ours, and their food too. They loved to mix with Muslims. We used to all go to the famous market baths every two to five days. Abu Hanna used to spend evenings with my father, and we, as children, played together in the

courtyard. We would go together to the hammams every Monday and Thursday. Women with women went on one day, and men with men on another day - Jews, Muslims and Christians. My mother would agree with the mother of Sarkis, for example, on reserving the hammam on a particular day for six or more families, and this is how we would get together."[68]

However, the politicians and the military did not care about this co-existence in Syrian life. The movement of February 23rd, 1966, despite its left-wing socialist discourse, began by polarizing rural and urban regions, the Druze and the Ismailis, Druze peasants and the upper class. Under the control of the so-called "alliance of lentils" (an appellation formed by uniting the first letters of the Alawites, Druze and Ismailis) and under the guise of general rural control, the Sunnis remained marginalized.[69]

In an article titled "The Syrian Community Thirty Years After Michael Sora", Researchers Akram Keshi and Jerome Mukurent contend that "if the regime in Syria depends on a neurosis it the neurosis of privilege, and so the anxiety of all its beneficiaries, whatever their sect, is that they stand to lose a lot if the regime falls."[70]

"In 1968, religious freedom was present in the army," says former Syrian army aide Ihsan Hamada, born in 1950. "Every military camp or barracks had a room called the mosque dedicated to prayer, and Christians gained freedom, and the Islamic sects including Sunnis, Shiites, Alawites, and Druze, all co-existed." Hamada adds that, "during Ramadan, for example, whoever wanted to fast fasted, and whoever did not want to fast had his food. Whoever fasted, after the Maghrib call for prayer, he would break his fast, and awaken for Suhoor. This tolerance continued until 1970 when harassment commenced."[71]

Sectarian discrimination in the army took on a more severe character, particularly with policies against the Druze and Ismailis, after the failed coup attempt led by officer Salim Hatoum in 1966.[72]

Hamada states, "the Druze community was targeted by the Sunnis, who exaggerated conflict initiated by any Druze person, especially after the Hatoum affair. In the same way, subsequently, the Sunnis were all accused of being brothers."

He adds, "In 1967, I heard them talking about members of the Druze community, saying that they surrendered Majdal Shams (a Druze village in the Golan) and raised the flag. This claim is implausible. People continue to be attached to their land with patriotism and dignity, whatever their origin, and will remain in their homeland and not surrender it whether Druze or Sunni. "

Hamada contends, "the Syrian army was fuelling sectarianism and trying to draw the Christian community to its side while targeting the Druze and the Sunnis. Even the Shiites were only recently recognized in light of current events."[73]

The Assad Era:

Conflict and rivalry within the army was echoed on the Syrian street. The population began to live through difficult times. This hardship arose out of a series of socio-economic transformations: the emergence of the public sector, the expansion of the workers' class in an attempt to give full expression to socialism, the rise of a small peasantry, and the continuation

of agrarian reform. This reform continued until 1974 when Hafez al-Asaad ended it in an attempt to ease leftist economic policies.

The army policy began to “make Ba’ath” its soldiers, and this became a new official nationalist, leftist doctrine. Non-party soldiers in the army were marginalized, employed as “companion” soldiers, unlike party soldiers or officers.[74]

Political activist Samir al-Nashar states: “during the time of Hafiz al-Assad, the Arab Socialists lost their credibility, and the Assad regime set to dividing the communists, the Nasserites, and all the political forces. They caused splits within these movements, rendering them mère disconnected political currents that were more easily controlled.

"Any opposition movement that refused to participate with the regime of Hafiz al-Assad became weak and targeted, unable to face his onslaught. I was one of those who distanced themselves from these currents and chose to direct myself towards the private sector."[75]

Sectarian discrimination in the army soon turned against the Alawites themselves. After successive coups, opposition to the Assad regime grew from within the Alawite community itself. At the beginning of the Assad era in 1971, motivated by the fear of new conspiracies, there commenced a wave of arrests and layoffs of Alawite officers and Ba’athist civilians from Lattakia,.[76]

In an article titled "Syrian Society, Thirty Years Later," Researchers Akram Keshi and Jerome Mukurent argued that, "with the arrival of Assad, there was a tendency to “make Sunni” the Alawite sect.” They indicate a rapprochement with Sunni Islam and the practice of prayer in Sunni mosques built in traditionally Alawite villages. Similarly, the official celebration of holidays following the Sunni calendar commenced, and Musa al-Sadr issued a fatwa joining the Alawites as a branch of the Shiites and Islam."[77]

The purpose of this move was to secure the majority, give the impression that Assad was one of them, protect his rule, and check his confidence with those who had turned against him.

Within the military establishment, leaders and officials never ceased to evoke sectarianism and ethnicity in a succession of power struggles, both before and after Assad's arrival. And indeed, Assad had the most significant role in broadcasting and promoting discrimination between sects and ethnic groups.

While Assad was aware of the danger of this discrimination against sects and ethnicities, of how this tactic could cause the fragmentation of his rule, he also realized that lighting the fuse between them was also the way his control could survive. Indeed, everyone felt secure as long as his power was stable.

Once Assad started to rule alone, this sense of stability may have been why his era witnessed quiescence without coup d’états. Such balance required severe repression and massive security control during the eighties and nineties.

"The security forces arrested me in 1980 on charges of publishing a press release and muffling information about security but these leaflets had been secretly distributed to the doors of houses so that people could wake up and find them," said Syrian-born Mohamed Brou, born in 1963. He added that he read the newspaper and exchanged it with seven of his

friends who were arrested in the same year and executed. Because he was two years their junior and under 17 years old, the death sentence was reduced to ten years' imprisonment, although he actually spent 13 years in prison.[78]

In the era of Assad, people were imprisoned with no distinction between the sects and ethnicities: all were convicted of conspiracy until proven innocent.

"I was arrested in 1987, and the majority of detainees were Sunni Arabs, many were Alawites, at least 40 people," recounts Daghistani Syrian activist Mohammed Malik, born in 1957. “And there were Druze, Ismailis and Christians; we were of all ethnicities and sects."[79]

Assad, the father, subdued every kind of opposition, no matter how small, and worked all the time with his networks and forces to incite the sects against one another.

Samir al-Nashar states that in the first ten years of Hafez al-Assad's rule, from 1970 to 1980, he managed to control and divide the political forces and parties to fragment them and compel the leaders to join him, and he put down all those who opposed him. Al-Nashar explained that after 1980, Hafez al-Assad's regime panicked as the trade union movement reached all strata of society. "When he moved onto the city of Aleppo, everyone was hit - Christians, Kurds, Arabs, Muslims and secularists. It was an authentic popular movement, and this is what motivated the regime to immediately suppress all protest, put thousands in prison, and to rebuild trade unions controlled by the regime, as in North Korea or the Soviet Union. Thus, Syria lost the last of its vital civil society institutions.”[80]

Characteristics of Assad’s Rule:

Hafez al-Assad's rule, from 1971 until 2000, was characterized by general features that we can understand by the scope of sectarianism and racial incitement, and by the extent to which average citizens began questioning one another to identify religion and ethnicity before names and status.

"Before the seventies, we were happy and lived together, and we had no problems with the people of al-Suwayda or Aleppo, for example, or with minorities," said Abu Reda al-Madani, a Damascus resident. "In my entire life, I never asked anyone to identify his sect. There were Sunnis, Assyrians and Christians, and they coexisted in harmony.”[81]

Social life began to take on religious and cultural features, to distinguish every sect and race. The decline encompassed all walks of life because of the Assad regime's policies of corruption, slogans contradicting reality, intimidation, repression and the manufacture of terror.

In his book *The Sectarian Question and the Problem of Minorities*, writer Burhan Ghalioun says, "Social degradation and contraction were accompanied by the return of vertical divisions that created distinct and highly differentiated lifestyles between groups. Every group transformed into a stage of degeneration of its social system, and into a racist community."[82]

Abdul Razek al-Lazz, an officer born in 1960, explains that in the 1960s life was simple and social relations in Syria were unproblematic. There was mutual respect between neighbours, there was no sectarianism, and Christians were like Muslims. "Then the Ba’aths began to

infiltrate society gradually, and the complications of the 1970s began when Hafiz al-Assad came to power along with the so-called reform movement, and that was the beginning of the destruction in Syria." The society was destroyed from the top down with sectarian ideas unknown in the 1960s.[83]

"Before the 1980s, everyone co-existed very well. I lived in Damascus near the Rukn al-Din neighbourhood, and I had Kurd, Alawite, Druze and Sunni neighbours," Ihsan Hamadeh said. "We would gather together in the evenings and for family occasions, and we visited each other on holidays. We had no problem with this at all. Following the events of the 1980s with the Muslim Brotherhood, one of our neighbours, an Alawite who had a good relationship with us, told my wife: 'If I were in Hafez al-Assad's place, I would have burned Aleppo from all four sides, Druze and Kurds included.' Then I took a stance against her, and we stopped visiting her, and we even became cautious in our relationships with Kurdish and Druze friends."[84]

Favouritism and Injustice:

The first signs of Assad's rule fuelling sectarianism in one way or another were the significant spread of corruption and favouring one party at the expense of another, and so large segments of Syrian society lived in injustice. The 1980s and 1990s witnessed systematic corruption. The army became the biggest boss in Syria and absorbed thousands of young people from areas loyal to the Ba'ath Party and from mountainous Shiite and Bedouin regions. Security administrations swelled with dozens of branches. There was a generalization of corruption and illegal gain through smuggling. The phenomenon of "extortion" spread widely, with almost open-ended vacations in the army in exchange for bribes paid to officers.

As rural residents migrated to the city, large numbers from the Alawite community joined the military and the security services. Security loyalty took a sectarian form, and the networks of corruption followed ethnic and sectarian channels. Ordinary citizens and merchants were harmed by the obligation to share their earnings with influential people, and criticism took the form of sectarian anger.[85]

"We were building 400 apartments and of course we needed raw materials such as cement and so on. There are materials that we buy, like tiles and marble, from the market accompanied by false invoices," says Mohamed Noureddine, born in 1968, and head of a military branch in Homs. "We had to send 20 tons of cement to the construction site, for example, but the head of the branch would transfer it to an acquaintance or relative. Construction workers, even military personnel, were made to serve on the beneficiaries' lands. "

"There was a buying committee in charge of maintenance, and here lies the biggest corruption deal," he said. "When we sent a car to an outside mechanic, the shop gave us an invoice. I remember one of the bills said the price was nine thousand pounds. Most of the money went to the head of the branch, and the rest was divided in a hierarchical order. If we wanted to talk about sectarian affiliation, the deal would be obvious. Money was divided by the Alawites, then perhaps some people from another sect, but they took a small share."[86]

"If the state is corrupt, then all systems will be corrupt," states Abdel Razek Laz. "Salaries are low enough to encourage corruption. For example, the district manager collected whatever money he could before leaving office."

Laz indicates that the corrupt practiced corruption freely but that there were honest police officers. But generalized corruption is contagious. "If the district manager does not give the money to the police chief, and the police chief to the minister, no one will remain in his post. In this case, he will deduct from funds earmarked for repairing the buildings, repairs of the machinery, training and so forth. Everywhere, even among political security forces, there are respectable officers."

Laz warns of the spread of corruption to customs. "One company started importing computers and spare parts, and programs should have accompanied these machines. Yet they were not sent by the company because they had a special contract." Customs agreed with the merchants to insert blank disks, although they were supposed to contain a program worth $100, and the importing company gained 5000 Syrian pounds. The amount was registered as five pennies with the Syrian treasury, and the company continued to collect millions. To facilitate state exploitation, specifications of the product were sometimes altered."

Regarding punishing corruption, Laz states, "there were a lot of cases of transfer, dismissal, referral to the judiciary, as there were laws that punished the corrupt. But members of dominant sects were punished only if exposed, and then only by transfer to another place. Anyone who did not pay bribes to those ranking higher than him would be tried for corruption. Punishment was earned by not sharing with them, not because of something they had done."[87]

According to Ihsan Hamadeh, the cause of corruption was low salaries, which led many to be laid off of work, and also the decline in acceptances into the army, especially for the Sunni community. "The salary was sufficient only if you were one of three categories, and this included officers: either you were a thief or corrupt, did additional work, or had another resource. Otherwise, you would starve to death."[88]

Rhetoric and Reality:

The Ba'ath Party and its governmental system raised many banners, such as that of nationalism, Arabism and socialism, and these encouraged hundreds of thousands of young people to join since its inception in the 1940s. The wager was that this Arab nationalism would replace ethnic and religious identities.

Many intellectuals and politicians held the view that if it were not for Arab nationalist sentiments, Syria would have been divided into states based on sects and ethnicities. Indeed, the Syrian people retained Arab nationalist sentiments, but it is the state that did not get rid of its banners. The state exploited its relationship to the sects for its own interests in an attempt to seize the demographic, economic and cultural force of the different sects. On the other hand, the sects or their representatives expressed no objection to such an unspoken deal, as if they were seeking a set of privileges instead historical injustice. This was historically what the state had dealt them so it had little to do with equal rights within the framework of citizenship.[89]

On the other hand, the banner of Arab nationalism and the resistance to Israel and its concrete implementation did make people sharper. For sects and ethnicities, it was not positive or open because it overrode their histories and identities.

In his book, Burhan Ghalioun writes about the sectarian issue and the problem of minorities. On his interpretation of Muhammad Abdo's concept of fervour, Ghalioun states, "religious zeal is necessary for the survival of national zeal and not for the attainment of special religious objectives."[90]

Indeed, with Arab nationalist allegiances, sectarian and ethnic loyalties began to weaken, as did national loyalties. Pan-Arab identity and allegiance eroded not only sectarian and cultural identities but also Syrian national identity. All villages and cities became connected to Damascus as the capital of orders and prohibitions. In contrast, there was no real contact between the villages and the towns, or clear political communities.[91]

Concerning the banners of Arab nationalism and socialism at the time, Ahsan Hamadeh said: "I began military service at a young age. We heard that Hafiz al-Asad had carried out the glorious reform movement and in this way the Arab nationalism with which we were taken would restore unity, freedom and socialism - a lot of flashy words. That is why we worked for it. Hafez al-Assad said that he wanted to liberate the Golan from Israel. That is why a large number volunteered and began to expand the army horizontally across a number of sectors, and modernize modern weapons in cooperation with the Soviet Union, all with the aim of liberating the Golan. Then with political maturity, we understood the truth."[92]

In Syria, the Syrian regime, based on the rule of a group from the Alawite sect, began to confront the growing popular opposition within Syria. In its quest to survive, the Syrian regime began to resort to a policy of oppression and intimidation and worked to eliminate those who raised their voices.

Political activist Hassan al-Nifi, born in 1963, states: "After the 1980s, political parties and political figures rebelled against the regime. They were intellectuals or came from the countryside. The rural class represented the political movement in Syria, but Assad crushed all opposition forces, and so opposition grew beyond the Muslim Brotherhood. The street was politically active in Syria, and everyone was subjected to great repression by the state for 10 to 15 years through the execution of members of the Muslim Brotherhood and the arrest of the communists.

He says of their dreams before this repression, "Arab unity was the cause of all Arabs at that time, especially because nationalist thought it was linked to issues such as the liberation of Palestine, independence and resistance to colonialism."

"I was arrested in 1986 when I was a student at the University of Aleppo where I lived in university housing. I was arrested at 11pm. I remember I was wearing sleepwear the moment I was arrested when the security agents walked through the door. They asked me to change my clothes and did not let me put on my shoes. They said, ‘you have a long way to go, 15 hours and 15 minutes’. It took me fifteen minutes of my life to end up behind bars."[93]

The mask of Arab socialist nationalism fell, and sectarian and ethnic strife escalated and rose to the surface. The socialist Arab nation was unable to bridge the gap. Instead, it became a battle of interests and fear of the ruler's oppression. "It is not Arab nationalism that undermined nationalism in the Arab Orient, but authoritarianism that used nationalist political ideology to gain systematic political control, and impose it on Arabs and non-Arabs alike," says Azmi Bishara in a paper entitled "The Sectarian Issue and Minority Trades in the Greater

Arab Mashreq." "Arab nationalism was used to fuel sectarianism and prevent true citizenship. Practicing human rights does not force individuals to pass through sect and clan, or rehearse loyalty to the Sultan."[94]

Ruralisation:

In its 1963 coup, the Ba'athist party was based on the military elite that belonged to the Syrian countryside and on different sects with similar rural backgrounds. These elites held leadership in the party and the state from 1959 to 1968, which was considered a green light for internal migration from the countryside to the cities. The peasantry began to expand, increase its influence, and progress economically and socially, in contrast to the previous era of urbanization. They began to complain, especially the urban merchants, about having to deal continuously with a bureaucracy that did not understand business dealings and lacked the experience of managing institutions. Or, they bore enmity against the urban population and traders and thus hindered their businesses.

Rural migration to cities continued, and the state administrative apparatus continued to promote itself as the incubator for the rural population. Thus, the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party was able to remain the "elder brother" down to the smallest details until the early nineties. The newcomers were a crucial tool in controlling all aspects of political, social and economic life.[95]

A Syrian citizen, Osama (a pseudonym), born in 1967, described the policy of ruralisation as a wave of urban settlement. He said that the main wave was concentrated in Homs: "When you say al-Zahraa neighbourhood, it is clear that you are talking about a neighbourhood under Shiite control. There is, of course, a mix of people, such as Christians and Sunnis, other rural people or the city's poor, who are looking for cheap housing in these rural neighbourhoods, or who build without regulations or official licenses. They were slums, but one majority group had control."

Osama explained that those who wanted to move from the countryside to the city were supposed to buy their land and build on it or buy an apartment if they wanted to, but the truth was entirely different. "What happened was planned and directed, and it was never random. It was planned that people emigrated from the countryside, and this is not limited to the Alawite sect or any other sect. New neighbourhoods formed following the process of demographic change that began in 1963."[96]

According to Syrian Abdullah Turkmani, "sectarian divisions began in conjunction with the ruralisation of the city of Latifia. It became increasingly clear that most of the security men were our brothers from the Alawite community. They transformed whole neighbourhoods to become their own. Thus, ruralisation occurred, by the power of these security men, with the emergence of sectarian divisions."

On the issue of sectarianism, Turkmani continues: "I knew people from Saliba, the original Sunni neighbourhood of Lattakia, and my friends were telling me 'you are Christian, so why do you frequent this person?'" Sunni Muslim and Christians began to feel this ruralisation moving through the city but this sentiment was more apparent in Sunnis. "[97]

Clearly, the state's interest in cities and lack of interest in rural development made rural people migrate to cities. The other reason for this movement was the policy of the government in Syria. When rural people came to the city and were appointed to different security positions, it was normal for them to move with their families.

"Damascus has become like the countryside, suffering from overcrowding and lack of hygiene. We no longer know each other. Of course, this is not the problem of the countryside or its people. It is the neglect of successive governments and their reluctance to develop the countryside and provide people with necessary services," says Syrian Mazen Kahal, born in 1959. The government seeks to keep the rural people as employees in its service, as well as to ensure that the wealthy and traders function as their employees through taxes and sharing in their profits."[98]

The sectarian dimension of the urban-rural divide in Syria is noteworthy. In the past, religious minorities were concentrated mainly in poor and disadvantaged rural areas, while Sunni Muslims dominated the wealthiest regions and large cities. Now "revenge" seems to be a way of righting the past. Conflict between Sunnis of major cities and members of religious minorities living in rural areas must have been much larger than religious differences. It becomes impossible to separate sectarian and geographical factors in the analysis of the religious and ethnic minorities in Syria.[99]

Fear Unites Sects

The promotion of interests and favouritism of one party at the expense of another according sect was a practice so developed as to have moved the countryside to the city. Assad and his administration evoked slogans of empty rhetoric and implemented these policies. These policies could not last for decades without the restraint of his supporters and opponents, held in fear through tyranny and repression.

There was a moment when fear rose within every Syrian citizen, regardless of his sect or ethnicity. Fear of government security forces and a desire to avoid getting involved with them moulded the character and behaviours shared by the different sects in Syria.

The Assad regime did not provoke this fear overnight but over many years of arrests, killings and defamation, with the goal of communicating with society in all its strata and sects. The truth is that the banner of Arabism speaks not of the unity of the Syrian people but rather the whip of tyranny. This version of Arab nationalism has been a deterrent to urban and rural opposition movements for decades.

Bashar al-Assad did not differ from his father, who used unprecedented violence in his randomness and cruelty, but he had inherited the kingdom of fear that had evolved over three decades of terrorism, and almost every Syrian lived this moment of terror with the regime and formed in his consciousness a barrier to the word “no.”

To get closer to the enormity of the matter and to the impact of the history of the production of fear in Syrian society, we must listen directly to the testimonies of Syrians who lived this moment and survived to tell the world about it. The Syrian revolution is considered to be one of the greatest revolutions of the world in terms of the legacy of fear.

"The events of the 1980s turned the Syrian people into a herd," says Mohammed Malik Dagestani. "It is unfortunate that anyone who raised his head said his fate was not imprisonment. I claim that the Syrian authorities imprisoned many because they posed a danger or threatened their security or future."

"There is a young man from Hama in Sednaya prison. He spent ten years in prison because he saw in a dream in that Hafez al-Assad was killed in a plane. He told a friend about his dream who spread the story in the classroom, and it reached the teachers. The terror of the principal was so great, that it was their national duty to report this child!"[100]

Mohammed Sa'id Salloum remembers his moment of horror: "The first war I witnessed was in Hama, and the regime accused the city of belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood ... They used to tell the people that I was the driver of a car and on one occasion I was told to drive soldiers. When we arrived, there was a young man who was terrified when he saw the soldiers and ran away. He entered a house with young men, women and children. The security men took everyone out of the house and arrested them in front of the wall. They killed them with machine guns. The man was standing by the side of the road. They handed over their bodies to their families, who put them in the car, and then took them to the refrigerators."[101]

One of the things that Ehsan Hamadeh remembers is the stories of his neighbours and friends during the 1980s: "They were checking on neighbours' visits to each other. I had a lot of neighbours, and I did not know who was from the Muslim Brotherhood and who was not. A neighbour confessed during the investigation that he had visited another neighbour. They arrested the first neighbour and he was put in prison for 15 years without knowing the reason for his arrest until he was released from prison due to his innocence."

Ihsan added that, "security used to bring in entire families - the mother, father, brothers and sisters - to terrorize people to the extent that one brother would inform on his brother to protect himself, and fear his sister, or his own family. "The regime recruited individuals as intelligence agents within their families. By these terrible means, the regime broke down family, community, city and neighbourhood "[102]

Your prudence or luck could protect you from a terrible experience with security in Syria, but there was no escape from the sergeant who grew up inside you, making you yourself irreproachable even in passing commentary. Something in you changed forever - fear and terror changed you, and changed the people around you. You would also witness the fear of others.

Mohammad Berro says, "In Syria, fear stains everyone. It's like taking a human being and then immersing him in black ink, fear, and he graduates into a person frightened of all the aspects of his life. Even if he wants to express his love and affection to you, he will only whisper it."

"I saw a Syrian like this in Malaysia. When we met and talked about the Assad family, I was speaking in whispers. I also had some friends in Lebanon who used to lower their voices when I sat with them to talk about the regime's crimes, even though they were at home, and they were the kind of Lebanese living in a storehouse of culture and politics. You can imagine the magnitude of the horror that this system left in Syrian society and its surrounding communities, such as in Lebanon."[103]

"I remember when I was young, I saw a picture of Hafiz al-Assad at my aunt's house. I asked her what his picture was doing here, and she smacked me on the face and told my mother what had happened. The explanation was simple. My aunt did not hit me because she loved Hafiz al-Assad but because she was afraid to say this to anyone, and my aunt would slap her son too if he said such words."[104]

On the production of fear, Samir al-Nashar says: "The element of fear and the internal censor co-existed. There may not necessarily have been a witness, and they may not have had the intelligence capacity to monitor every citizen and what he said, but they succeeded in creating the self-restraint that forced everyone to be vigilant. Many people disappeared; no one knew their fate. This generation lived in oppression and fear. "[105]

“Here’s a story that may summarize the level of fear reached by the Syrian people,” said Mustafa Fattouh, born in 1971. "I cannot forget the summer of 2000. In June, I was in a region far from my home (Adrez) with a group of harvest workers. Suddenly I saw my brother coming on a motorcycle, and the expression on his face betrayed something. I realized he muttered before he spoke, and I asked him what happened. I went silent and drew him to me, and he told me that Hafiz al-Assad had died. Since our childhood, we had grown accustomed to the notion planted inside us that this was a person who did not die and could be touched by death or by any natural capacity. I was shocked by the news. I could describe what I felt at first, maybe like someone had drenched me with cold water, so cold I thought it was hot. After I had recovered from the shock, I could not tell the field workers, or the owner of the farm we were working on.[106]

This production of terror in Syria may be explained by decades of Ba’athist rule, by the force of the first spark of the Syrian revolution. On the other hand, it reveals the shock of the regime and its security apparatus, and the brutality with which it was used to support the revolution with the help of external forces. Fear has taken control of people forever.

Chapter Three: The Dialectic of Sectarianism and Social Harmony

The exploitation of sects and minorities according to state interests via the army and administrative apparatus contributed significantly to the replacement of social ties with sectarian bonds. Thus, there was a new alignment in the structure of government, and the army worked to strengthen the ethnic, tribal, regional and religious ties according to state interests at the expense of the bonds of citizenship in a homogeneous society. The peaceful coexistence of the various members of a community took the form of automatic social exchange, perhaps an unpredicted reaction to the policies of an ethnic, sectarian state balancing its interests.

These policies, entrenched in the exploitation of sectarianism, have given social relations a hint of socialism and social form and the idea that all are equal. But in fact, these policies have been mired in Syrian society for years, destroying trust and a sense of security.

"I used to go with a group of children from my village to school on foot. There was one teacher for all primary school students and sometimes when he was absent we used to go to a village called Khajouka for our lessons," said Kurdish Syrian Abdel Bari Osman. We were used to walking because there was no public transportation. My village is called Dumkhia, a Christian village far from the Arab villages. In summer, the Bedouin Arabs came to our

village and brought their livestock because our village let sheep graze on our land after harvest. They brought with them their tents. There was a mutual friendship between us. The predominant social environment was tribal, with customs and traditions close to our own. We offered them all the use of all our facilities and welcomed them. We offered them cold water because it was not available in the tents, and in turn, they slaughtered sheep in honour of the people of our village. We had a neighbour, mama Georgette from our Christian brethren. I used to visit her and sleep in her house, and she loved me very much, like her son Gabi. I did not feel for a moment a difference between us - that I was Muslim and he Christian."

Osman explained that he began to recognize the practices of the Ba'ath Party when he reached the preparatory stage in 1979 and they differentiated between the students. They threatened them with fees, ostracism, and the incitement of students against one another if they did not join the party. The number of Ba'athists among students was very few. "The Baathists were trying to prove that they were protecting minorities and that they were Democrats by placing Christians in sensitive positions such as directors, heads of branches and mayors. We were made to feel the distinction between Kurds and Arabs, Arabs and Christians, Christians and Kurds, and the Shawi, the Diri, and the Raqawi."

Osman recalls more of these policies that sowed hatred and injustice among social groups. "We were prevented by administrative decisions from speaking in the Kurdish language in schools, and there were some Ba'athists who complained when we spoke Kurdish," Osman recalls. "I was a member of the Kurdistani Democratic Party (KDP). At one point I gave one of the teachers some books about the history of the Kurds and Kurdistan. One of them saw me, and the political security came and pulled me out of the examination room, and I was expelled because of them. They pressured me and asked me to cooperate but I refused."[107]

These policies continued to punish minorities and sects of all kinds, and made the reign of the Ba'ath Party one of the most dangerous Syrian stages of despotism, corruption, and influence according to allegiance. It became necessary for the regime and its gang to create a social incubator, starting from the army and security institutions, and ending in every street, house to house. Several social factors may have contributed to the existence of this social incubator, which was later considered a reason for the decline of the Syrian revolution. These factors were dynamic and parallel to the ethnic and sectarian uses of the army as if the one covered the other.

First, the Syrian regime allowed social freedom within society as long as it did not take a political dimension, including social and literary exchange and development. This freedom extended to eliminating reference to religion in personal identity documents and supporting the position of the ruling regime on the question of Palestine, its opposition to agreements signed with the Zionist entity, and Palestinian national resistance in Lebanon and Palestine. The regime supported the Palestinian resistance with a portion of the national wealth. The regime also supported many basic needs and provided free education, free healthcare and unrestricted employment.[108]

The members of this incubator did not complain but believed that the situation was ideal in an ideal government; the government supported them economically and gave them the freedom to express their religion, customs, and beliefs while preserving Palestine and the principles of Arabism. It was, therefore, difficult for this part of society to see injustice and the justification behind the descent of tens of thousands to the street calling for the overthrow of the regime.

Deeper in this analysis, we may find that these reasons, in one way or another, contributed to a lengthy period of mindless coexistence, despite the fervour that began to escalate as a result of and reaction to the other hallmarks of this regime, such as tyranny, corruption, discrimination and slogans.

Coexistence was more real and true in early decades than it is now. The process of social co-existence since then has entailed a great deal of mistrust, which ended many experiences of joy, social harmony and participation in social events and rituals between different sects.

"The days have gone very well. If there is no special occasion, we visit friends, parents and fellow teachers. On national occasions, we all gather together to eat our lunch wherever we are. We do not ask about the identity of people or their affiliation or religion at all. Who is Christian, Muslim or Yazidi? "
Shmuel recalls his memories of special occasions, like the engagement of one of his friends, when he collected donations from teachers through the school's social committee to buy a gift.

On national holidays, he would go with the rest of the teachers on a trip to the banks of the Khabour River, and then head to a restaurant to have dinner or lunch, teachers with teachers and without distinction, as a family of all groups. [109]

According to a study entitled "Social Rift in Syria", there is a permanent decline in the critical elements of social capital in Syria, such as confidence, the participation of women, cooperation to overcome problems, participation in decision-making, a sense of safety in the aftermath of political crises and or exploitation of sectarianism,[110] suspicion in neighbours, sharing their realities whether carry doubt in their hearts or not, with no theory or the adoption of empty Baathist slogans, but through the innocent practice of secularism.

"In the countryside of Aleppo, we lived and coexisted with all sects and clans," said Khalil Ibrahim, a Turkman Sunni Muslim, age 33. "We did not have any tribal or sectarian chauvinism, and my family and I did not think in a racist way or try to distinguish ourselves as Turkmen. We were without ethnic fanaticism." Ibrahim adds that during study there were Kurds, Christians, Armenians, Turkmen and Arabs of all tribes, and there was nothing to differentiate them at all. Ibrahim referred to the cases of marriage between Arabs and Turkmens, and said that he never heard the words "this is a Turkmen" and "this is an Arab." The young man asked for the bride's hand, and they were able to marry if his reputation and that of his family were acceptable, regardless of whether he was Arab, Kurdish or Turkmen. He himself lived the experience and married an Arab woman.[111]

Circassian Dana Yacoub, 32, says that, “some Circassian families go to their native countries in the Caucasus for university study and continue their lives there. But in fact, most Circassians yearn for their villages in the Syrian Golan more than the Caucasus because they integrated to such an extent that some of them attained advanced positions in the state. "I had an interior minister of Circassian origin, members of a Circassian People's Council, and advisers in the Republican Guard." The Circassians achieved important posts in Syria, and were equal and on par with any other citizen. Motivated perhaps by vanity, sometimes it was later mentioned that they were from the Circassian Golan."

"Of course, I am Syrian of Circassian origin and often my unfamiliar family name reveals my origin, and in general this nationalism is still present in every Circassian."

As for their native language, Dana says Circassian is only common among older people. Her grandmother speaks Circassian because she lived in a Circassian village, and thus her mother also knows this language. Dana hardly knows Circassian, and most of her generation do not know it well because it is difficult to learn.

"Although the Circassians of Syria tried to get involved in Syrian society, they remained somewhat closed off, to preserve their customs and traditions." There were entire villages where all the inhabitants were Circassians before the exodus from occupied Golan. They spoke only the Circassian language and lived just as they lived in the Caucasus and with the same customs.[112]

The popular consciousness of this community and some of the elite continue to confuse the political system with the state, although sects are not supposed to have a relationship with the political system. However, the official political application does not mention this, and this has led to the generation of sectarian culture. Political movements and peaceful civil movements are almost non-existent in Syrian society. Indeed, there has been a significant failure to apply the concepts a modern democratic state, from good governance, civic peace, and nonviolence programs to the ongoing state of political tyranny for over forty years.[113]

"I lived in al-Qamishli, where Kurdish nationalism coexisted with Assyrian and Syriac nationalism, and with Armenians, Arabs and Circassians," says Syrian Kurdish activist Zardtisht Mohammed, age 49, who moved from al-Qamishli to Hasakah in the early 1970s. Zardtisht points out that they began to receive military lessons, "bullying" in the preparatory stage. "For us, as Kurds, we were worried about these lessons and quotas, and despite the commitment of the youth organization to all students, we did not attend youth meetings as it was apparently not the business of Kurds."[114]

Successive political upheavals have shown that the Syrian society is in constant transition. It faces a chronic crisis between traditional and Salafist ideologies and cultures and between modernity, the forces of division and unity, integration and disintegration, as well as external interventions. Like other societies in the Arab region, it suffers from the kind of subordination that the thinker Halim Barakat intimated in his book *Alienation in Arab Culture: The Maze of Man Between Dream and Reality*. When a society loses control of its resources and capabilities, rather than society controlling its institutions, institutions control society. This reversal leaves human beings and community with the will, the goal, and the plan for change. Social relations seem to be active but mostly informal and based on primary ties that contradict civil and formal relations.[115]

These contradictions may be evident in the recent account of Turkmani Bakir Muhammad Ali, who says, "I am from a village called Shamarin. Relations between the Arabs and the Turks were intimate. We did not know distinctions so everyone shared weddings and events. We knew this very well in the 1980s and '90s. No one spoke of nationalities or sects, and people did not realize that one was a Turkmen and the other an Arab. Syrian society united them."

Bakir succeeded in getting his doctorate in Arabic but his experiences were ignored in every new job and place he worked. Instead, they put less emphasis on knowledge and experience. Bakir refuses to describe this as a kind of discrimination against him because he is a Turkmen. He sees himself as Syrian and perceives that society views him as such as well.

"At the institute, some people knew that I was of Turkish origin. We had a student who was not interested and did not study, and once he wanted to silence me and made a joke to impress the girls. He said to me: 'You are a remnant of the Ottomans.' And I responded laughing and said, 'you did not study your lessons in Arabic, and you will be a failure as a teacher. Look at my interest in the Arabic language and then look at yourself as a proud descendant of this tradition.' Many colleagues were surprised that I was Turkish, as the name Valkti does not suggest that. "

During the discussion of Bakir's master's thesis, one of the supervising doctors addressed him with comments that were inappropriate to the discussion of his thesis, and with a degree of hostility. An older colleague said to everyone, "We are proud of our brother. We are a family of Turkish origin. My father does not know Arabic, and his son studied Arabic and received a master's degree in an Arab country like Syria."[116]

Conclusion

Syrian communities and minorities have experienced discrimination for many years - a result of the harsh reality of shortages, overwhelming poverty, the difficulties of education, commutes between cities, marriage, child-rearing, as well as the search for work. Indeed, political power only cultivates and spreads discrimination through tyranny, corruption, financial control, nepotism, repression and the worship of interests, and even transforms sects into sectarianism and minorities into factions. Individuals return to call up their roots and ancestors, their pride in an original sense of belonging. They do not follow the course of history in the margins of equality but in history's traces and refuges. With escalating differences, collective allegiance cannot be assigned national or Arab identities as these banners soon fell flat. This sense of belonging is a daily reality and an innate natural love that soon fades until it becomes a constellation of memories and coincidences lived in the Diaspora.

References

Laws:

• The Syrian Constitution: Decree 94 of 2012, which came following the provisions of Legislative Decree No. 8 dated 1-3-1973.

Books and Studies:

• Ismail, Ramia and Group of Researchers, The Impact of the Conflict on Social Capital, "Social Rift in Syria," Syrian Center for Policy Research, Syria, Damascus, 2017.
• Bishara Azmi, The Sectarian Question and Minority Industries in the Greater Arab Mashreq, Amran Magazine, Vol. III, No. 11, 2015.
• Beshara, Azmi, Syria: Path to Freedom - An Attempt at Present History, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, Doha, 273.
• Jerome Mukurent - Akram Keshi, an attempt to read the Syrian society "Thirty years after Michel Soura" - Criticism and analysis of sectarian discourse, Arab Center for Policy Studies, Amra Journal of Studies and Research No. 10/6, Doha, 2014.
• Ghalion, Proof, The Sectarian Question and the Problem of Minorities, Al-Tali'ah for Printing, I, Beirut, 1979.
• Ghazali, Nasser, sectarianism and its role in the Syrian society, without a publisher.
• Qutrib, Hussein, Syria and the demographic change in Syria, King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, Saudi Arabia.
• Van Damme, Nicholas, The Struggle for Power in Syria - Sectarianism, Regionalism, and Tribalism in Politics, Initial Electronic Edition, 2006.
• Kakhia, Tariq, sects, and ethnicities in Syria, publisher unknown, 2013.
• Abidine, Zain, the sectarian challenge in Syria, the way of Islam, 2013.

Websites:

• Al-Jazira, Why does the Alawite minority control the Sunni majority in Syria? 2014, https://bit.ly/2OKtrHQ
• UAE Today, Syria is a multi-religious country in sectarian harmony, 2012, https://bit.ly/2EmOzzJ
• Syrian Revolution Network, an estimate of the number of Alawites in Syria, 2013, https://goo.gl/7E1yUy
• Sindawi, Khalid, The Time of Shiites Facts and figures about Shi'ism in Syria (1/3) Field research, translation Hamad al-Issa, 2013 ,العصر, http://alasr.ws/articles/view/14417/
• THE WORLD FACTBOOK, Middle East SYRIA, 2018, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sy.html
• Al-Sikinah, The Human Religious Map in Syria, 2012, Date of Arrival, 27/8/2018, https://www.assakina.com/center/parties/18329.html
• Syrian Center for Political and Strategic Studies, Population in Syria, 2018, date of access to the website, 27/8/2018, http://scpss.org/?page_id=26
• Al Jazeera, sects and races of Syrian society, date of access to the website, 27/8/2018, https://goo.gl/6PDo3n
• Wikipedia, Syrian Christians, Wikipedia, Turkmen in Syria, https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86

• Knowledge, Dagestan, https://www.marefa.org/%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%BA%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86
• Kamal, Abdullah, Dagestan is not the advocate of the land of mysticism, beauty, and licentious fighters exploited by Russia, Post politicians, https://www.sasapost.com/dagestan-is-the-land-of-wrestlers-and-beautiful-nature/
• Bashir, Thib, Chechnya, Shishan Jordan site, https://goo.gl/cw9Wkz
• Wikipedia, Chechnya in Syria, https://goo.gl/csSyYu
• Abidine, Zain, the sectarian challenge in Syria, the path of Islam, 2013, p. 9 https://goo.gl/53yrm4

Interviews referenced from Sharq's oral history collection "Syrian Histories"

• Interview with Syrian Samir Nashar in Turkey, 6 June 2017.
• Interview with Syrian Ahmed Abdel-Al in Lebanon, 19 July 2016.
• Interview with Syrian Ihsan Hamada in Turkey, May 22, 2017.
• Interview with the Syrian Muhammad Pro in Turkey, on 14 June 2017.
• Interview with the Syrian Muhammad Malik Dagestani in Turkey, on 31 May 2017.
• Interview with Syrian Abu Reza Al-Midi in Turkey, dated 17 August 2017.
• Interview with Syrian Abdul Razek Al-Laz in Turkey on 22 August 2017.
• Interview with the Syrian Muhammad Nur al-Din in Turkey, 16 July 2016.
• Interview with Hassan al-Nifi in Turkey, May 20, 2017.
• Interview with Syrian Osama "alias" in Turkey, on 16 August 2017.
• Interview with Abdullah Turkmani in Turkey, September 8, 2017.
• Interview with Syrian Mazen Kahal in Turkey, on 2 August 2017.
• Interview with the Syrian Mohamed Said Salloum in Lebanon, 19 May 2016.
• Interview with Syrian Nazem "pseudonym" in Turkey, 30 August 2017.
• Interview with Syrian Omar Jiba'i in Lebanon, June 29, 2016.
• Interview with Mustapha Fattouh in Lebanon, May 10, 2016.
• Interview with Syrian Shmuel Warda in Lebanon, April 11, 2016.
• Interview with Syrian Khalil Ibrahim in Lebanon, 12 July 2016.
• Interview with the Syrian Dana Jacob in Lebanon, on 21 January 2017.
• Interview with Syrian Zardasht Muhammad in Turkey, 13 June 2017.
• Interview with the Syrian Abdul Bari Othman in Turkey, on 1 July 2017.
• Interview with the Syrian Bakir Muhammad Ali in Turkey, on 29 August 2017.

Endnotes

[1] Bishara, Azmi, “The Sectarian Question and the Minority Industries in the Greater Arab Mashreq,” *Amran Magazine*, vol. III, No. 11, 2015, p.14.

[2] Al-Jazeera, “Why does the Alawite Minority Control the Sunni Majority in Syria?” 2014. https://bit.ly/2OKtrHQ

[3] Van Dam, Nicholas, *The Struggle for Power in Syria - Sectarianism, Regionalism and Tribalism in Politics*, Initial Electronic Edition, 2006, Cairo, p. 4.

[4] Van Dam, Nicholas, op. cit., p. 35.

[5] *The Syrian Constitution*: Decree No. 94 of 2012, which came in accordance with the provisions of Legislative Decree No. 8 dated 1-3-1973 containing the provisions of the referendum. Article 3 states: "1. The religion of the President of the Republic, Islam.
2. Islamic jurisprudence is a major source of legislation.
3. The State shall respect all religions and shall ensure the free exercise of all its rites, without prejudice to public order.
4. The personal status of religious communities is protected and respected. "

[6] *UAE Today*, “Syria is a Multi-religious Country in Communal Harmony,” 2012, https://www.emaratalyoum.com/politics/reports-and-translation/2012-03-20-1.469833

[7] *Network of the Syrian Revolution*, “Estimate of the Number of Alawites in Syria,” 2013 https://bit.ly/2zZSs9y

[8] Sindawi, Khalid, “The Time of Shiites Facts and Figures about Shi'ism in Syria,” (1/3) *Field research*, translation Hamad al-Issa, 2013.
http://alasr.ws/articles/view/14417/

[9] *THE WORLD FACTBOOK*, Middle East SYRIA, 2018, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sy.html

[10] Kachia, Tariq, *Sects and Ethnicities in Syria*, Publisher Unknown, 2013, p. 6-7.

[11] “Human Religious Map Inside Syria,” 2012, *Date of Arrival*, 27/8/2018, https://www.assakina.com/center/parties/18329.html

[12] Syrian Center for Political and Strategic Studies, “Population in Syria,” 2018, *Date of Arrival*, 27/8/2018, http://scpss.org/?page_id=26

[13] Kachia, Tariq, op. cit., p. 28.

[14] Al Jazeera, “Sects and Ethnicities of Syrian Society,” date of access to the website, 27/8/2018 https://bit.ly/2HvgiuM

[15] Syrian Center for Political and Strategic Studies, op. cit.

[16] Al-Sikinah, “The Human Religious Map in Syria,” op. cit.

[17] Kachia, Tariq, op. Cit., p. 44.

[18] Al Jazeera, Sects and Ethnicities of Syrian Society,” op. cit.

[19] The Syrian Center for Political and Strategic Studies, previous reference.

[20] Nirvana, “Human Religious Map in Syria,” op. cit.

[21] Al Jazeera, “Sects and Ethnicities of Syrian Society,” op. cit.

[22] Al-Sikinah, “The Human Religious Map in Syria,” op. cit.

[23] The Syrian Center for Political and Strategic Studies, previous reference.

[24] Cakhia, Tariq, op. cit., p. 74.

[25] Syrian Center for Political and Strategic Studies, op. cit., previous reference.

[26] Al Jazeera, “Sects and Races of Syrian Society,” op. cit.

[27] Al Jazeera, “Sects and Ethnicities of Syrian Society,” op. cit.

[28] Syrian Center for Political and Strategic Studies, op. cit., previous reference.

[29] *Wikipedia*, “The Christians of Syria,”
https://bit.ly/2PpjjkH

[30] *Al Jazeera*, Sects and Ethnicities of Syrian society,” op. cit., previous reference.

[31] “Human Religious Map Inside Syria,” 2012, *Date of Arrival*, 27/8/2018,
https://www.assakina.com/center/parties/18329.html

[32] “Human Religious Map Inside Syria,” 2012, *Date of Arrival*, 27/8/2018,
https://www.assakina.com/center/parties/18329.html

[33] Wikipedia, https://goo.gl/Qx6TQ4

[34] Kakhia, Tariq, op. cit., p. 156

[35] *Al Jazeera*, “Sects and Ethnicities of Syrian Society,” date of access to the website, 27/8/2018,
https://bit.ly/2HvgiuM

[36] Kakhia, Tariq, op. cit., p. 181.

[37] Al-Sikinah, “The Human Religious Map in Syria,” op. cit.

[38] *Wikipedia*, Turkmen, https://goo.gl/j8Vmdj

[39] Al Jazeera, “Sects and Ethnicities of Syrian Society,” op. cit.

[40] *Wikipedia*, “Turkmen in Syria,” https://goo.gl/wg77Ph

[41] Al-Sikinah, “The Human Religious Map in Syria,” op. cit.

[42] *Knowledge*, Dagestan, https://goo.gl/wNr8Cq

[43] Bashir, Thib, “Chechnya Jordan Site”
https://bit.ly/2ObmKiu

[44] *Wikipedia*, Chechnya in Syria,
https://bit.ly/2OIeuWP

[45] Cakhia, Tariq, op. cit., p. 209.

[46] Al-Sikinah, “The Human Religious Map in Syria,” op. cit., previous reference.

[47] Al Jazeera, “Sects and Ethnicities of Syrian Society,” op. cit., previous reference.

[48] Al-Sikinah, “The Human Religious Map in Syria,” op. cit., previous reference.

[49] Qutrib, Hussain, “Syria and the Demographic Change in Syria,” King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, Saudi Arabia, p. 4.

[50] Qutrib, op. cit., p. 17-18.

[51] Van Dam, Nicholas, op. cit., pp. 17-18.

[52] Bishara, Azmi, *Syria: Path to Freedom - An Attempt at Present History*, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, Doha, p. 273.

[53] Bishara, Azmi, op. cit., p. 275.

[54] Van Dam, Nicholas, op. cit., p. 20.

[55] Van Damme, Nicholas, op. cit., pp. 20-21.

[56] Van Damme, Nicholas, op. cit., pp. 20-21.

[57] Bishara, Azmi, op. cit., p. 279.

[58] Van Dam, Nicholas, op. cit., P. 21.

[59] Abdeen, Zain, *The Sectarian Challenge in Syria: The Path of Islam*, 2013, p.9. https://bit.ly/2OaILOm

[60] Bishara, Azmi, op. cit., pp. 277-280.

[61] Abidine, Zain, op. cit.

[62] Bishara, Azmi, op. cit., p. 281.

[63] An interview with Syrian political activist Samir Nashar in Turkey, on 6 June 2017, Sharq org.

[64] Van Dam, Nicholas, op. cit., p. 39.

[65] Van Dam, Nicholas, op. cit., p. 65.

[66] Van Dam, Nicholas, op. cit., p. 65.

[67] Van Dam, Nicholas, op. cit., p. 65.

[68] Interview with Syrian Ahmed Abdel Aal in Lebanon, 19 July 2016, Sharq Org.

[69] Bishara, Azmi, op. cit., p. 284.

[70] Jerome Mukurent - Akram Keshi, an attempt to read the Syrian society "Thirty years after Michel Soura" - Criticism and analysis of sectarian discourse, Arab Center for Policy Studies, *Amra Journal* specialized in studies and research No. 10/6, Doha, 2014, p 59.

[71] Interview with the Syrian military Ihsan Hamada in Turkey, on 22 May 2017, Sharq Org.

[72] Van Dam, Nicholas, op. cit., p. 88.

[73] Ihsan Hamadeh, previous interview.

[74] Bishara, Azmi, op. cit., pp. 285-286.

[75] Samir al-Nashar, previous interview.

[76] Van Dam, Nicholas, op. cit., p. 111.

[77] Jerome Mukurent - Akram Kashi, op. cit., p.58.

[78] Interview with former Syrian detainee Muhammad Bro in Turkey, on 14 June 2017, Sharq org.

[79] Interview with the former Syrian detainee Mohammed Malik Dagestani in Turkey, on 31 May 2017, from the Organization of East

[80] Previous interview, Samir El Nashar.

[81] Interview with the Syrian Abu Reza Al - Midi in Turkey, on 17 August 2017, Sharq org.

[82] Ghalioun, Burhan, "The Sectarian Question and the Problem of Minorities," *Al-Tali'ah* for Printing, Beirut, 1979, p.17.

[83] Interview with the Syrian officer Abdul Razek al-Laz in Turkey, on August 22, 2017, Sharq org.

[84] Ihsan Hamadeh, previous interview.

[85] Bishara, Azmi, op. cit., p. 294.

[86] An interview with the Syrian Muhammad Nur al - Din in Turkey, on July 16, 2016, Sharq, org.

[87] Rizk El Laz, previous interview.

[88] Ihsan Hamadeh, previous interview.

[89] Bishara, Azmi, The Sectarian Question, Imran, op. cit., p. 10.

[90] Galion, Burhan, op. cit., p. 46.

[91] Van Dam, Nicholas, op. cit., p. 22.

[92] Ihsan Hamadeh, previous interview.

[93] Interview with Syrian political activist Hassan al-Nifi in Turkey, on 20 May 2017, Sharq, org.

[94] Bishara, Azmi, *The Sectarian Question*, Imran, op. cit., p. 13.

[95] Bishara, Azmi, *Dar al-Alam*, p. 300.

[96] Interview with Syrian Osama 'pseudonym' in Turkey, on August 16, 2017, Sharq, org.

[97] Interview with Abdullah Turkmani in Turkey, September 8, 2017, Sharq, org.

[98] Interview with Mazen Kahal in Syria, August 2, 2017, Sharq, org.

[99] Van Dam, Nicholas, op. cit., p. 35.

[100] Mohammed Malik, previous interview.

[101] Interview with Syrian Mohamed Said Salloum in Lebanon, 19 May 2016, Sharq, org.

[102] Ihsan Hamadeh, previous interview.

[103] Mohammed Bro, previous interview.

[104] Interview with the Syrian artist Omar Jbai in Lebanon, on June 29, 2016, Sharq, org.

[105] Samir al-Nashar, previous interview.

[106] Interview with Syrian Mustafa Fattouh, Sharq, org.

[107] Interview with the Syrian Abdul Bari Othman in Turkey, on 1 July 2017, Sharq, org.

[108] Ghazali, Nasser, sectarianism and its manifestations in the Syrian society, without publisher, p.16.

[109] Interview with Syrian teacher Shmuel Warda at his home, on 11 April 2016, Sharq, org.

[110] Ismailia, Ramia and Group of Researchers, *The Impact of the Conflict on Social Capital*, "Social Rift in Syria", Syrian Center for Policy Research, Syria, Damascus, 2017, pp. 6-7.

[111] Interview with Syrian Khalil Ibrahim in Lebanon, 12 July 2016, Sharq, org.

[112] Interview with the Syrian Dana Jacob in Beirut, on 21 January 2017, Sharq, org.

[113] Ghazali, Nasser, op. cit., pp. 22-23.

[114] Interview with the Syrian political activist Zardasht Mohamed in Turkey, on 13 June 2017, Sharq, org.

[115] Ismail, Ramia, op. cit., pp. 26-27.

[116] Interview with Syrian d. Bakir Mohammed Ali in Turkey, on 29 August 2017, Sharq, org.