SYRIA IN THE MIRROR:
The Politics of Belonging to Syria from Syrian Diasporas in Armenia and Australia

A Thesis

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By

Marisa Della Gatta

Department of Modern History, Politics and International Relations

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Abstract

With the escalation of the conflict in Syria, since 2011, religious and ethnic groups have been increasingly politicised on the basis of identity. By studying Syrian immigrant communities in Armenia and Australia, this thesis explores Syrian diasporic transnationalism, testing how politicisation of identities in Syria permeate and condition what being Syrian means in exile. The focus is on the relationship between formulations of Syrian identity at the political level, before and after the outbreak of the conflict, and those of diasporic Syrian-ness.

It is argued that Syria represents a case in which communal disunity is used to equate to political dissent, and where mobilisation around religious and/or ethnic identity is a result of social, political and economic disadvantage in periods of political crisis. The Syrian diasporas in the two countries chosen for the case studies, Armenia and Australia, give shape to a simplified reproduction of the politics of belonging at stake in the Syrian homeland.
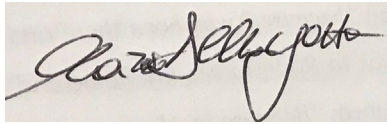
This thesis contributes new empirical knowledge about the political dimension of multi-layered Syrian identity. The analysis of Syrian diasporic political identity draws on interviews with Syrian-born representatives of Syrian immigrant associations, and 84 interview-based surveys with representatives, members, and independent Syrian respondents. What emerges from an integration of empirical results, theories and secondary sources is that with the sectarianisation of the conflict, the explicit use of ethno-religious identity in political debates has a social impact on diaspora. The nature of the influence is mixed: it has led both to divisions amongst Syrians and to cohesive national feelings embracing the in-group versus out-group narratives.

To frame the complexity and ambiguity of Syrian identity re-constructions, this thesis adopts a post-structuralist constructivist approach, which does not see group attachments and national cohesion as intrinsically dichotomous. On the contrary, this study demonstrates the need to understand under what circumstances the sub-loyalties can provide a solid basis for national cohesion. The results can help evaluate the effects of national crises of identity away from the state-centred perspective that has dominated Syrian studies.

Statement of Authorship

Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself. The research was undertaken under the approval of Macquarie University HREC (Human Research Ethics Committee) (approval no. 5201600249, 5 August 2016).

Marisa Della Gatta

Date: 25/06/2018

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Note on transliteration and translation

This dissertation is in conformity with the Transliteration Standards laid out by the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES). Translations and transliterations are omitted for proper names, places, and words included on IJMES's common word list. All translations from Arabic, Armenian and Italian are my own, and I take full responsibility for errors or ambiguities.

Preface

This PhD thesis locates itself in the *alea* that surrounds qualitative social research, a field where there are no shared ground rules for determining the significance of findings or for interpreting them. The aleatory nature of the analysis is particularly manifest in socio-political enquiry and lies in the fact that systems are interpretations themselves. As Patton puts it, "In short, no absolute rules exist except perhaps this: Do your very best with your full intellect to fairly represent the data and communicate what the data reveal given the purpose of the study".[1] The lack of canons in the evaluation of qualitative findings is not undesirable, since it gives the researcher freedom in the analytical process. To undertake analytical thinking requires judgment, sensibility, and creativity.

The research journey

Due to ethical concerns on political questioning of refugees, this study reflects the transformation of different research hypotheses. The originally proposed aim was to directly evaluate religious and ethnic diversity in Syria and the political approaches towards it with a historical perspective. After data collection, I realised the use of the category of diaspora, chosen because of the inaccessibility of Syria for social research, did not allow drawing conclusions on Syrian society and politics in general, due to obvious and substantial differences between the conditions of Syrian people living in and outside Syria. Acknowledging the complexity of early stage research journeys, this study can still help understand Syrian identity in general. The views of diasporans, who are directly or indirectly affected by the Syrian conflict, can offer a new understanding of the mimicry of Syrian society abroad.

Politically loaded terms

Discussion on Syria is highly politicised around the contraposition between pro-Assad versus pro-opposition narratives, if not propagandas. Each of them has developed its

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[1] Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, p. 439.

own language. In particular, the terminology used by the supporters of President Bashar al-Assad includes "the Syrian government", "the Syrian Army", "rebels", "resistance" and "crisis". On the contrary, the equivalent anti-Assad terms are "the Syrian regime" or "dictatorship", "Assad forces", "opposition" and "revolution".

This thesis uses politically loaded terms in a neutral way or reports them as participants in the fieldwork used them. As a political sociologist researching Syrian diasporans on Syrian politics, it was important to be as apolitical as possible to let diasporans express their political views with no bias. Both pro-Assad and anti-Assad participants used the term "Syrian regime", translating from the Arabic original *al-niẓām al-sūrī*. *Niẓām*, translating into regime, is a neutral term that refers to a system of government and does not have the negative implications of its English equivalent. The responses to social survey and the interview used for this research confirmed the neutral usage of the expression. In this thesis, then, "regime" corresponds to the literary translations from the Arabic *niẓām* and in no way suggests a political stand taken by the researcher. The political attitudes that emerge from the fieldwork reflect the bipolar politicisation around Syria, but also contribute to the discussion, hopefully going beyond black and white narratives and letting grey areas emerge.

The Syrian conflict

The "Syrian conflict" appears as a politically neutral definition for the war that started in early 2011 in the form of civil unrest for the "fall of the regime" in the motto *al-shaᶜab yurīd ʿisqāt al-niẓām* (translating "people want the fall of the regime"). With military intervention from the regime, the uprising turned into an armed insurgency. Due to the repression, sectarian violence and internal warfare that followed, it is not inappropriate to define it as a civil war.[2] In fact, a civil war involves: military action internal to the metropolis, the active participation of the national government, and effective resistance by the two sides.[3]

The fact that state violence is sustained and reciprocated further distinguishes civil wars from other forms of internal armed strife. What makes the war in Syria extremely complex – maybe so complex that it might be considered a form of

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[2] Sambanis, N. (2004). "What Is Civil War? Conceptual and Empirical Complexities of an Operational Definition." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution,* 48(6), 814-858.
[3] Sambanis (2004), p. 815.

sophisticated civil war – is the local dimension of military actions, the intermittence of siege by the national government in different districts even within a single city, and the presence of more than two sides, with different armed groups that do not share a unique military and political plan. While civil war is an acceptable definition, I decided to avoid using the term in direct designation of the Syrian conflict when I realised that it would not have reflected the views of the majority of the respondents who made this thesis possible. The war became an international conflict officially in 2013 with the emergence of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) and when foreign intervention took place.[4]

There are many different ways to interpret the conflict in Syria. Political causes have been identified as lack of "authoritarian upgrading" by Hinnebush[5], and disappointment of expectations around reform in Syria. Economic explanations include problems associated with state-centred economy[6], access to commodities (gas and petrol) and the drought crisis. Geopolitical reasons lie in the long-drawn-out rivalry of Russia and Iran with the United States, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Israel. Interpretations, including those formulated by interviewees, are moment-specific given that to date the war in Syria is still an unfinished business.

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[4] Averre, D., and Davies, L. (2015). "Russia, humanitarian intervention and the Responsibility to Protect: The case of Syria." *International Affairs,* 91(4), 813-834.
[5] Hinnebusch, R. (2012). "Syria: From "Authoritarian Upgrading" to Revolution?" *International Affairs*, 88(1), 95–113.
[6] Hinnebush (2012).

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Syria: Diversity and conflict

Syria is one of the most diverse states in the Middle East in religious and ethnic affiliations.[7] Other diverse countries in the region such as Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt have sharper divisions in the religious composition of the population: Maronite, Shia and Sunni groups in Lebanon; Shia, Sunni and Kurds in Iraq; Copts and Sunnis in Egypt. In Syria, groups are so internally differentiated that often ethnic and religious affiliations overlap and distinguish a group from another. As long ago as the middle of the twentieth century, observers had already noted that ethic and confessional diversity in Syria is the product of the evolution of a prolonged heritage.[8] Although demographic information is unreliable in Syria, Sunnis were estimated to be over 70% of the Syrian population, Alawis 12%, Christians 8%, Druzes 3% and Armenians 2%.[9] Recent estimations updated in 2011, report Sunni Muslims as 75%, Alawis, Kurds and Christians as 10%, Druzes 3% and Armenians 1%.[10] Other ethnic minorities are Turkmens (4-5% of Syrian population), Assyrians (3-4%), and Circassians (1.5%).

It is estimated more than 58% of the Christian population (with many sub-groups) left Syria since the outbreak of the unrest in 2011 and its conversion into one of the bloodiest conflicts in modern history. As the Syrian diaspora grows, it may transform Syria from the most ethnically and religiously diverse country in the Middle East into a more homogeneous state or several homogenous statelets. A more optimistic scenario could leave Syrian society complexly configured, as it has always been, with ethno-religious Muslim, Christian and mixed-denomination groups living together.

This thesis examines how Syrian multifaceted identities are politicised and the conditions for them to become politically salient. This helps understand national

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[7] De Vaumas, E. (1955). "La population de la Syrie". *Annales de géographie*, 64 (341), p. 74. http://www.persee.fr/doc/geo_0003-4010_1955_num_64_341_15478 (accessed 9 January 2016).
[8] De Vaumas (1955).
[9] Samman, M. L. (1978). *La population de la Syrie: étude géo-démographique.* Paris: IRD Editions, p. 9.
[10] Mustafa, K. (2013), "The impossible partition of Syria"*, Arab Reform Initiative.* https://www.arab-reform.net/en/node/510 (Accessed on November 23, 2018).

identity formation and interpretations of Syrian political identity in diaspora. The term ethnic identity is used in a strictly sociological, non-biological sense. In Syria, ethnicity reflects family and blood attachments, but there are no clear distinctions between ethnicity and religion, tradition, culture, language and region. As Romeny notes when taking the example of Orthodox Syrians, the formation of the ethnic community starts from religion and ethnicity but then it evolves by adding other factors such as language, culture and territory.[11]

The heterogeneity of the Syrian population, in an orientalist view, has been considered a factor in the instability and the incoherence of the Syrian nation-state, very often in association with sectarianism and regionalism[12], especially after the outbreak of the conflict in 2011. Following Brown and Doorbos, I reject the idea of the saliency of ethnic and religious attachments as *producing* societal antagonism and ultimately conflict.[13] Conversely, it understands ethnic and religious tensions as *products* of political crises.

In Syria, the identity of the nation is politically fragile because identitarian questions such as nationalism, sectarianism, secularism and minority become salient in periods of instability. Internal and external displacement due to the refugee crisis makes the issues even more complexly positioned in Syrian studies. To what extent has the Syrian conflict created a crisis of identity in Syria and in diaspora?

Consistent with the interpretation of religious tensions as products of political crisis, this thesis argues that the revival of identity affiliations for Syrian diaspora groups is dictated by old and new political dynamics of disadvantage exacerbated by the war in Syria. The impact of conflict-generated tensions on identitarian feelings in diaspora is closely related to the link that diasporans maintain with the Syrian homeland currently affected by one of the most violent escalations of recent times. Diaspora (diaspora literally means dispersion, from the Greek *diaspeirein*), at the same time, complicates and oversimplifies the relationship between Syrian nationals and their home country, because of the effects of time, space and emotional

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[11] Romeny, B. T. H. (2005). "From religious association to ethnic community: A research project on identity formation among the Syrian Orthodox under Muslim Rule." *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations,* 16 (4), 377-399.

[12] Esman, M. J. and Rabinovich, I. (1988). *Ethnicity, pluralism, and the State in the Middle East.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

[13] Doornbos, M. (1991). "Linking the future to the past - ethnicity and pluralism." *Review of African Political Economy,* 52, 53-65; Brown, D. (1989). "Ethnic revival: Perspectives on state and society." *Third World Quarterly,* 11 (4), 1-17.

alterations. Analysis of such fluctuating connections is a primary interest of this thesis. Individuals and groups, especially diasporans, are not stable, rather they are in motion within, beyond and across national borders. The immigrant communities that constitute the empirical foundation of this thesis, Syrian groups in Armenia and Australia, experience an interesting status, fluctuating within the transnational and the categories of diaspora, refuge, and exile.

It is argued that the Syrian refugee crisis, for the degree of dispersion and the systematic nature of transnational attachment that was created, gives shape to a new diasporic dimension of Syrian identity. In the work of Baron and Gatrell, the term "dis-placed" is conceived as outside normative temporality and spatiality. The crosscutting and often contradictory nature of displaced selves makes the "itinerant perspective" approach particularly suitable to study categories of displacement such as refugee, exile, deportation and repatriation.[14] This perspective takes into account migrants' subjective experiences and the self-perception of itinerant subjects for the understanding of continuous diasporic dislocations.

Because of state-centred understanding dominating the literature on Syria, integration with social research is essential. Adopting a non-reductionist approach, subjects are not seen as passive recipients of narratives surrounding the identity of the state. By taking into account the voices of Syrian groups in diaspora, the aim is to investigate the relationship between politicisation of identity categories at state level and the formation of Syrian national identity from below in diaspora, looking at possible coincidences or dichotomies. This is intended to consider diasporic identity as a category of practice.

Unlike categories of analysis that are "experience-distant", categories of practice are "categories of everyday social experience, developed and deployed by ordinary social actors". [15] This thesis takes into account ordinary identity attachments formulated by Syrian people in exile. Thus, Syrian identity is a category of the social experience in the sense that the distance from war-torn Syria produces fragmented and multiplicities of selves in Syrian communities outside Syria. The interaction

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[14] Baron, N. and Peter, G. (2003). "Population displacement, state-building, and social identity in the lands of the former Russian Empire, 1917-23." *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History,* 4 (1), 51-100, p. 52.
[15] Brubaker, R. and Cooper, F. (2000). Beyond "identity". *Theory and Society,* 29 (1), 1-47. p. 4.

between the two can lead to a deeper understanding of the Syrian social mosaic[16] of identities and its replicability in diaspora. This includes an evaluation of the role of political and institutional frames in influencing group identities through the exploitation of ethnic, religious and cultural capitals.

Nationalism is one of the most important tools in the politicisation of identity. The idea that primordial sub-identities accentuate divisiveness and are, in a sense, an obstacle for the construction of national consciousness remains dominant in the literature on ethno-nationalism.[17] Beyond primordialism, this thesis explores feelings of Syrian national identity from below in diaspora, looking at a possible integration between sub-national and national identification and evaluating the potential role of sub-national identities for the formation of national identity. The case of Syrian Armenians, a typical ethno-national diasporic group of Syria, is the exemplar for the possibility of mutual sustainment between ethno-religious and national attachments.

The new diaspora of Syrian Armenians who were forced to flee from Syria to the supposed homeland of Armenia is an influential case study. This peculiar form of repatriation is not new in post-Genocide (1915) Armenian history, but is exceptional because it is conflict-generated for the first time and applies to only the Armenian community of Syria, predominantly from the Syrian city of Aleppo. The unique experience of enforced displacement to an unfamiliar homeland is extraordinarily interesting, because the movement of the Syrian Armenian community is where diaspora, identity, religion, ethnicity and nationality collide.

For the analysis to look beyond the perspective of a single ethnically and religiously defined Syria group, a more extensive case study is undertaken with the Syrian community in Australia, a country of immigration where communities can nurture their identity and maintain the relationship with the home country within the frame of a multicultural society. The difference of contexts does not allow direct comparisons between the case studies.

The combination of the extensive and the influential case studies, taken alone or together according to the research question, can give a defined picture of Syrian identity re-constructions after the outbreak of the conflict in the host countries. It is not possible to make predictions on the modification of the identity of the Syrian

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[16] See the definitions below.
[17] Brubaker and Cooper (2000), p. 81.

nation that the displacement will produce because of the unfinished nature of the crisis. Nevertheless, the empirical analysis of the nexus between diasporans and their homeland in terms of identity, combined with a theoretical evaluation of the two-way relationship between the identity of the nation and national identity in diaspora, produces new insights for understanding what being Syrian means. This may or may not correspond to what the Syrian state specifies what being Syrian means.

1.2 Key definitions: Syrian social mosaic, minority and sect

The thesis evaluates whether polarisation around religious and/or ethnic identity in the homeland is echoed in diaspora. This requires a new understanding of the Syrian "social mosaic" by not discarding it as a tool for understanding Syrian groups, but stressing the necessity of treating it as categories of practice rather than as categories of analysis.[18]

As Altug notes, the orientalist perspective considers the Syrian mosaic as a society composed of isolated blocks, which are intolerant of each other and hate generating.[19] In the colonial view, Syrian society was a "crazy collection" of religious and ethnic communities, a mosaic of races and religions.[20] This was linked to fragmentation, separateness and the idea of Christians under the yoke of the Muslim majority state.[21]

Richard T. Antoun indicates the relevance of the mosaic model for understanding Syrian society[22], because of the persistence of regional specialisations in the distribution of Syrian population. Economic activities, class statuses, territorial linkages and confessional ties created natural and artificial barriers between communities.[23] Are the barriers fixed? Do they inevitably produce societal antagonism in Syria? The impossibility of conducting archival work and fieldwork in Syria means answering these questions only in theoretical terms, but it is possible to say whether the fluid social mosaic in Syria influences the lives of Syrians in

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[18] Brubaker and Cooper (2000).

[19] Altug, S. (2011). *Sectarianism in the Syrian Jazira: Community, land and violence in the memories of World War I and the French mandate (1915- 1939)*. In I. Onderzoeksprogramma, R. Dep Filosofie En, & M. Van Bruinessen (Eds.): Utrecht University.

[20] Khoury, P. S. (1987). *Syria and the French mandate: the politics of Arab nationalism, 1920-1945*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

[21] Makdisi, U. (2000). *The culture of sectarianism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 15.

[22] Antoun, R. T. and Quataert, D. (1991). *Syria: Society, culture and polity*. Albany: State University of New York Press, p. 3.

[23] Antoun and Quataert (1991), p. 26.

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diaspora.

The category of "minority" is also extremely delicate in Syria. Emerging after the formation of Syria as a nation-state, the term has to be used carefully to avoid an "unreflective use of minority as an analytical category".[24] Seen as a category of practice, minority is not a fixed definition and different groups fit in it, with a specific social and political significance according to the historical context. The conception of minority depends on the evolution of the framework of the nation-state.[25] In the Middle East, minorities are divided into two the major categories of religious and ethnic groups established during or after the nineteenth century, accepting that some groups cross-cut any classification. In Syria, as a result of Ottoman and colonial confessional politics (on this see also chapter 4), both ethnicity (Arab/non-Arab with Arab as the ethnicity of the majority) and religion (Sunni/Shia and Christianity with Sunni as the religion of the majority) define a minority. White groups Syrian minorities into four categories, according to both language and religion:

1. Non-Arabophone Sunni Muslim communities (e.g., Sunni Kurds)
2. Arabic-speaker belonging to (broadly) Muslim, but non-Sunni, religious communities (e.g., Alawis and Druzes)
3. Arabophone Christians (e.g., Syrian Orthodox Christians)
4. Non-Arabophone Christian refugees (e.g., Armenians).[26]

Such categorisation is useful, keeping in mind that groups are internally and externally differentiated. Under religious labels like Sunni, Shia or Christian there are various sub-groups that follow different branches of religion. For example, Rosiny observes that Syrian Sunnis have different ethnic compositions and territorial fragmentation (even within the cities of Damascus and Aleppo), and divergent political aspirations and religious beliefs.[27] The same can be said for Syrian Christians.

Minority is defined as a "group distinguished by common ties of descent, physical appearance, language, culture and religion, in virtue of which they feel or are regarded as different from the majority of the population in a society".[28] This thesis is

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[24] White, B. (2007). "The nation-state form and the emergence of 'minorities' in Syria." *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism,* 7 (1), 64-85.
[25] White (2007), p. 65.
[26] White (2007), p. 71.
[27] Rosiny, S. (2013). "Power sharing in Syria: Lessons from Lebanon's Taif experience." *Middle East Policy*, 20 (3), 42-56. p. 47.
[28] Brubaker, R. (1995). "National minorities, nationalizing states, and external national homelands in the new Europe." *Daedalus,* 124(2), 105-128, p. 107.

grounded in this neutral definition, where the interaction of psychological, cultural, ethnic, religious and social factors is particularly evident. Minorities are territorially concentrated in Syria, to the extent that a minority group becomes a majority group in local areas. The most important example is that of the ruling minority, the largest religious minority of Syria, Alawis, which is more than 90% of the population in the coastal region of Latakyia.[29] Alawis also represent the majority of the Syrian Army and hold relevant positions in the Syrian parliament under President Bashar al-Assad.[30]

While during the Ottoman millet system, "religious community" was the dominant term to classify diverse groups. Syria was part of the Ottoman Empire and subjected to the millet system, that lasted from 1453 to the end of the nineteenth century, and was composed of different "agreements" between religious communities and the Imperial state.[31] The Greek Orthodox, the Jewish and the Armenian communities represented the three basic millets of "indirect rule based on religion".[32] As visible from the surface, the organisation is not religious in the strict sense, since Greeks and Armenians are both Christians (respectively Orthodox and Apostolic or Catholic denominations). While inter-religious differences within Christianity were acknowledged with independent sub-millet churches[33], the same did not occur within Islam, since Sunni, Shia, orthodox and heterodox Muslims were placed under the same label of Islam and *Umma* or Islamic community.

Minority emerged as a category in mid-nineteenth century and was established under the French Mandate (1920-1946). In that period, it was declared in the Constitution of Syria that the electoral law guaranteed the representation of confessional minorities.[34] White explains that religion remained the principal category of identification.[35] In fact, the Circassians' request for autonomy in 1928 was rejected by the French rulers, since they could not represent a religious "community" because

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[29] Farouk-Alli, A. (2015). "The genesis of Syria's Alawi community" in *The Alawis of Syria*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[30] Farouk-Alli (2015).

[31] Weiner (1998), p. 25.

[32] Weiner (1998).

[33] The Christians in Syria were divided amongst four churches: Melkite, Armenian, Maronite and Jacobite. However, Marcus notes that Muslim administrators did not always care about the distinctions within Christians. Marcus, A. (1989). *The Middle East on the eve of modernity: Aleppo in the eighteenth century*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 40.

[34] Reproduced in French in Gannini, A. (1931). *Le Costituzioni degli Stati del vicino Oriente.* Instituto per l'Oriente.

[35] White (2007), p. 73.

of their religious belonging to the Sunni majority.[36]

Hourani believed that "every Chamber elected since the issue of the Constitution has contained an *appropriate* number of representatives of minorities".[37] On the other hand, Rabinovich speaks of the "constitutional failures" and the "subordinate position of minorities".[38] In any case, the category had a political significance. Fildis clarifies that the divisive strategy of colonial particularism was in direct contrast with the emergence of independence claims. To quote directly: "Separatism and the particularism of religious and national minorities — *politique minoritaire* — were encouraged by the granting of autonomous status to areas where such minorities formed a majority".[39] The French *divide et impera* or "divide and rule" had precise political intents: the political maintenance of the colonial power, the appeasement of the independence movement, and religious protection (very often, in forms of political prevalence, as Altug notices[40]) of Christians.

The minoritarian nature of sects becomes problematic when the ruling class is composed of a particular sect, as in the case of Syrian Alawis. The Alawi, in fact, is a religious sect and a minority, but, at the same time, is politically dominant in governmental positions and in the military apparatus of Syria. The Weberian conception of the "voluntary dimension" of sect is also problematic in the Middle East. Weber distinguished sects from churches (the former ones are voluntary, the latter ones are from birth), stressing the "pejorative development" of the sectarian dimension with heretical and non-official tendencies.[41] On the contrary, in Syria churches and sects can coincide, and sects are mostly official.

Sect is another key term for the study of Syrian political identity.[42] From Latin, *secta* (from which section derives, the idea of cutting circles and sections of society) has to do with a doctrine (religious or philosophical), a way of thinking or a style of life. In this thesis, sect is the literal translation of the Arabic "*ṭa'ifa*", which implies

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[36] White (2007), p. 74.
[37] Hourani (1983), p. 75.
[38] Rabinovich, I. (1979). "The Compact Minorities and the Syrian State, 1918-45." *Journal of Contemporary History, 14*(4), 693-812, p. 711.
[39] Fildis, A. (2012). "Roots of Alawite-Sunni rivalry in Syria". *Middle East Policy,* 19(2), 148-156, p. 148.
[40] Fildis (2012), p. 79.
[41] Weber, M. and Loader, C. (1985). "Churches and Sects in North America: an Ecclesiastical socio-political sketch." *Sociological Theory,* 3(1), 7-13, p. 8
[42] The definitions below all basically derive from Ernst Troeltsch's distinction between church-type and sect-type.

the idea of religious sections and factions in society as in the Latin connotation.

In Arabic, the term has historical roots[43] and is also widely used in everyday language to distinguish religious groups from the Sunni mainstream. Syrian Armenians participating in this study talked about their community as a *ṭa'ifa*. Even though it is more accurate to describe Armenians as belonging to a Christian ethnic group than a sect, Armenians are included in the discussion on sectarianism based on this practical definition and self-definition.

The adjectival noun "sectarianism" *ṭa'ifiyya* was only coined in the nineteenth century. Unlike *ṭa'ifa*, *ṭa'ifiyya* carries an unequivocally negative connotation, closely related to *taᶜaṣṣub* or "agitation".[44] Ibn Khaldun in the 15th century believed it is "inevitably productive of conflict".[45] A strong impact metaphor by van Dam conveys the negativity of sectarianism in Syria five centuries later, which is "seen as a dangerous social disease which should be combated with all possible means since it supposedly strengthens social divisiveness".[46]

This thesis does not question the negative and conflict-generating effects but considers sectarianism as the consequence of, and not the reason for, political crises. The thesis considers the reasonably negative acquisitions of the term throughout history – bigotry, discrimination, separation, restrictions, hatred and factionalism – but, at the same time, uses the neutrality of the term as membership in a historically and doctrinally defined religious community.

1.3 Research questions and hypotheses

The theoretical framework is an important step for defining the research questions to be transferred into social analysis. The latter is framed in the broad political sociology approach that predominantly adopts qualitative methods (with the exception of the branch of electoral behaviour).[47] Within the vast area of political sociology focusing on the relationship between the state and civil society, this research is collocated in

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[43] Seventeenth century historians such as Istfan Duwayhī (1603–1704) already employed the term alongside the now outdated term "milla" to refer to denominations and confessional groups.

[44] Butrus al-Bustani speaks of *taᶜaṣṣub al-madhhabī* (literally, "doctrinal tension") thus perhaps for the first time invoking the notion of "confessional extremism". See Al-Bustani, B. (29 October 1860). *Nafīr Surıya*, 29(1).

[45] Ibn Khaldun (1967 [1377]). *The Muqaddimah: an introduction to history.* (translated from the Arabic by Franz Rosenthal). Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 36.

[46] Van Dam, V. (1981). *The struggle for power in Syria: Sectarianism, regionalism and tribalism in politics, 1961-1980*. London: Croom Helm, p. 26.

[47] Patros, T. and Stepan-Norris, J. (2015). "Political sociology". *Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 472-479, p. 475.

the "social bases of political attitudes and behaviour".[48] In the specific case, the research question studies the influence of politicisation of ethno-religious affiliations on national identity. The second question examines the correlation between political uses of identity and the formation of political identity in diasporic contexts.[49]

One of the pillars of the thesis's approach is the interrelation between theory and practice. The social research is analytical (or explanatory) and theory-driven,[50] where empirical results help revise theoretical assumptions. There is no prejudice on the validity of the theories. Because of the ongoing and uncertain nature of the events in Syria, it was possible to analyse the Syrian diaspora as an itinerant process, not without an historical retrospective, where space and time dimensions are complex. Questions on Syrian diasporans' group identity are:

- Which discourse amongst pan-Arabism, pan-Islamism, secularism, nationalism and sectarianism is the most representative for Syrian people in diaspora?

- What is the relationship between group identity and Syrian-ness? Does it represent an obstacle to national feelings? In the case of Syrian Armenians, to what extent does the Armenian component interfere with their Syrian-ness?

- Is the current Syrian conflict influencing Syrian national and/or community identity in diaspora? If so, how?

- Does group belonging influence the perceptions of Syrian groups regarding past Syrian policies and their predictions for the future?

In theory, community identity influences and motivates the members producing an amount of homogeneity in the group.[51] It is still unknown whether the Syrian conflict altered community motivation and homogeneity. A hypothesis stemming from the reflection on identity in general (examined in Chapter 3) is: community attachments are not fixed; rather they depend on the socio-political context and political crises impact on identity formation.

It is impossible to conduct interviews and social observation in Syria due to the

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[48] Patros and Stepan-Norris (2015), p. 472.
[49] Bellamy, R. (2004). "Developments in pluralist and elite approaches". in Nash, K. and A. Scott (eds), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Sociology*. Blackwell Publishing, p. 7.
[50] Buckingham, A. and Saunders, P. (2004). *The survey methods workbook: From design to analysis*. Cambridge, Malden: Polity, p. 14.
[51] Kim, S. C. H. and Kollontai, P. (2007) (eds.). *Community identity: dynamics of religion in context*. London; New York: T & T Clark.

high risk to researchers and participants. Instead, the research interest is in the indirect field of diaspora, looking at the medium and long run diasporic settlements (settled refugees and older generations of immigrants) of Syrian communities in Armenia and Australia. How do the diaspora experience and group belonging affect the formation of a new historical Syrian consciousness in Australian and Armenian immigrant communities?

Armenia and Australia are chosen because they are highly representative to help form a picture of Syrian groups' beliefs about causes and effects of the Syrian conflict. In the two countries, it is possible to talk about new Syrian diasporas, in which the outbreak of the conflict is one of the main reasons for the creation or re-creation of Syrian diasporic communities. Future research could extend to other countries such as Turkey, Sweden or Germany where there is evidence that Syrian refugees have organised themselves in social and political groups.

In addition, the presence of Syrian "satellite" communities appears to be significant in the two countries. For instance, scholars for the Cartography and Geographic Information Society in 2013 traced the map of "global virtual communities formed around issues of specific national interest", using the Syrian geopolitical situation as a key study.[52] In analysing the contributions on Syria from social media users, they define Syria as a "polyentree", since there are Syria-interested communities from many countries in the world, calling them virtual "satellite communities" of Syria. Interestingly, Australia, a country of immigration, is one place where this kind of community exists. The targets of the study are Syrian satellite communities in Australia and Armenia. But the approach is social, real rather than virtual.

A more extensive hypothesis of the thesis is: in the host countries or in diaspora settings, there is a simplified replication of the Syrian social mosaic that is subjected to politicisation, but an endemic tension amongst Syrian groups should not be assumed. The tension is the result of political and social conditions in Syria and in the host countries. Perceived and real threats reinforce group social identity. Syrian groups are exposed to indirect echoes of the Syrian conflict also outside Syria, in Armenia and Australia as key study countries.

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[52] Stefanidis, A. et al. (2013). "Demarcating new boundaries: mapping virtual polycentric communities through social media content." *Cartography and Geographic Information Science,* 40 (2), 116-128, p. 116.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

A common Syrian identity, whose elements are still to be scrutinised, keeps together Syrian people in diaspora and maintains the link with the Syrian homeland. The following analysis of Syrian identities evaluates the multifaceted and not always linear process of Syrian identity construction. A complex form of Syrian-ness emerges, which starts from and coexists with sub-national group identity.

Chapter 3 reviews approaches towards identity and their application for the study of Syrian heterogeneous groups. This chapter relies exclusively on theories, since it poses the theoretical bases for the study of Syrian identity in the contexts of conflict and state collapse, displacement and diaspora. All the other chapters include an integration of theoretical insights on state instruments for driving Syrian identity informed by the responses of diasporans resulting from the fieldwork.

Chapter 4 frames Syrian population displacement under the category of diaspora, taking into account its effects on identity formation. In the Syrian homeland, different identity-based political narratives and ideologies are at stake in the quest for Syrian political authority. Nationalism (Chapter 5) is the most important ideological field for the state to dictate identity affiliations. In Syria, this is closely connected to the majority/minority issue and Arabism and is politically problematised by an obscure weaving of pan-Arabism, pan-Syrianism and Syrian nationalism.

Where Arabism ends, the sectarian card comes into play, discussed in Chapter 6. Sectarianism is an exceptional instrument of politicisation of group identity, especially in periods of political instability. Recent analyses of the Syrian conflict look at sectarianisation as an outcome of the ongoing crisis and Syria is considered as the country where it is suffered most. In the current Syrian conflict, *ṭa'ifiyya,* the corresponding Arabic term for sectarianism, works for two opposed outcomes: for exacerbating violence and for providing for basic human needs and humanitarian assistance in the humanitarian impasse of the war. Both have more to do with the manipulation of religious attachments than with the presence of socially endemic sectarian identities and my research indicates that they are replicated in the diasporic experience.

In Chapter 7, secularism, which is closely related to sectarianism in Syria, rather than being an instrument for politicising loyalties, is a component in the shaping of

the identity of the Syrian state. It is often used in Syria and in exile to exercise control over religious associations. Secular narratives are challenged by the revival of Islamism in the current conflict, and both impact on national consciousness in diaspora. If scrutinised through the lens of Syrian diaspora identity formation from below, these identitarian tools are reimagined and reformulated into narratives of secularity, religious solidarity and of a new religious sensibility. From the analysis, a complex reformulation of Syrian diasporic identity emerges generally not corresponding to the dominant one.

Chapter 8 concludes by examining the ambiguity of Syrian identity in the past, present and future and reaffirms the argument that diasporic mobilization around identity is a reproduction of the dynamics in Syria. The division between Sunni and minority groups, replicated in diaspora, are better explained as political phenomena generated by the sectarianization of the conflict rather than as sectarian tensions. This thesis has shown that the division between groups on the basis of identity is fluid. Sectarian tensions are formed by political crises, then this opens the door for thinking of ways in which such tensions can be deescalated.

Chapter 2. Methodology

This thesis is the product of a pragmatic and hybrid approach towards qualitative research. While the literature and theoretical accounts have driven the empirical questioning throughout this thesis, the explanation was determined by a reverse reasoning: to revise theories through the lenses of empirical knowledge for deriving general principles. The research design comprises two case studies, one extensive (Australia) and one more influential (Armenia). Data was collected by three methods: interview, survey and social observation over an eleven-month period (one month for the influential and the remaining ten months for the extensive case study). The questions for the interview and the questionnaire were designed to test the research hypotheses. The social observation also aimed to notice behaviours associated with responses. After interviews and observation, empirical evidence was derived from the collected data through interpretation and explanations. For this task, the approach was not solely deductive, but rather a combination of deduction and induction (see below section 2.9). Staring from theory for the formulation of hypotheses (deduction), factual evidence was used to test theoretical generalizations. As a result of data analysis, basic believes were incorporated into the theories, as a form of induction. An integration deductive and inductive derivation appears an effective approach for intuitive and indirect studies like this thesis.

2.1 Questionnaire design

The interview-based and interview-administrated questionnaire was face-to-face, relatively long (around one hour), flexible (with the possibility of jumping around questions and continuing as the interviewee pleases), and complex (with the possibility of expressing ideas). Questions were presented in plain language with prompts and guidelines, so they were understandable to the participants. The questions were worded simply, and kept as short and as unambiguous as possible, as survey design manuals suggest. Versions were available in Arabic and English to the participants to create the best condition for them to understand the questions.

The questionnaire included closed-ended questions (with yes/no or multiple

choice, using a five-point Likert Scale), open-ended questions (for providing details, explanations and comments, sometimes with prompts), and mixed questions (sentence completion), very often linked to each other. There were more closed-ended questions and a balance between factual questions and attitude questions[53] to avoid excessive effort and commitment from participants.

Question wording aimed to simplify the questions, to reach the highest level of comprehensibility and unambiguity of the questions.[54] According to Oppenheim, "the focus and the content of the questions must be right", the "wording suitable", and the sequence "must help the respondents without unintentionally biasing the answers".[55] The question wording and the sequence are intended to "motivate the respondent to continue to co-operate".[56] A way to make the questionnaire motivating is to word the questions in an "attractive way" and choose a "consistent sequence". [57] In order to achieve reliability and validity[58] of attitude and factual questions, the strategy used is the formation of "sets of questions" in which the item to be measured is composed of different questions worded differently but asking substantially the same thing.[59]

The composition of the item pool, a scale of attitude statements, is important.[60] As Oppenheim explains, "we must try to keep the item pool reasonably *balanced*", with equal numbers of items related to an attitude, items covering attitude from one extreme to another, and an equal proportion of positive and negative items. [61] The balancing of the item pool is particularly important in the Likert scale. The closed-ended questions in the questionnaire used the Likert scale, mostly because of its high reliability. [62] It usually includes five prompts: strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree, and strongly disagree, with each of the prompts associated with a number from 5 to 1.[63]

A criticism of the Likert scale is the difficulty of measuring a neutral or middle

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[53] Factual questions aim to measure facts, while attitude questions aim to measure attitudes.
[54] Oppenheim, A. N. (1992). *Questionnaire design, interviewing, and attitude measurement.* New York: St. Martin's Press, p. 54.
[55] Oppenheim (1992)*,* p. 121.
[56] Oppenheim (1992).
[57] Oppenheim (1992), p. 122.
[58] Reliability refers to the consistency and the repeatability of a measure; validity tells the researchers whether the question measures what it is supposed to measure. Oppenheim (1992), pp. 144-145.
[59] Oppenheim (1992), p. 147.
[60] Oppenheim (1992), p. 179.
[61] Oppenheim (1992), p. 181.
[62] Oppenheim (1992), p. 200.
[63] See also Gilham (2000).

point.[64] The prompt "uncertain" might simultaneously mean a lack of knowledge, a lack of attitude or a lukewarm response, without telling the researcher about the reasons for that response. To gain more information about the middle point, the sets of questions include open-ended or sentence completion questions to justify the agreement, disagreement or uncertainty. Sentence completion, in particular, is useful to achieve spontaneity from the respondent, since the device proposes incomplete questions to be completed with the first thing that comes to respondents' minds.[65]

When the Likert scale results were inappropriate for the measurement of a certain item, alternative questions were used that Oppenheim calls "varieties and applications". In particular, some questions ask the respondent to give a rating by ticking what is right with prompts such as "worries me a lot, little, hardly ever worries me, or in a scale of importance or how bad/how good something is.

The English version of the questionnaire is in Appendix 1 and the translation into Arabic is in Appendix 2. To measure the identity of participants, the questionnaire starts with the set of questions related to identity, without asking for biographic details (gender, age and name) that are in the final part. This can help the respondent to identify early the scope of the research, it conveys confidentiality and encourages cooperation. To avoid confusion some questions seem to be redundant (to define nationality, place of birth, languages spoken). But in questionnaire design redundancy is not negative, especially in complex situations in which the researcher wishes to avoid ambiguity. Since the aim of this thesis is to evaluate how Syrian diasporic identity is influenced by the politicisation of Syrian identity, the data on the participants' identity needs to be investigated through theoretical labels working at state level such as ethnicity, nationality and religion. They are all relevant for the identification of Syrians.

The survey had variety in question wording and structure. An example of a scale question is: Could you put your identity affiliations on a scale of importance? (1=the most important). In this question, the Likert scale does not seem very effective since the researcher needs to precisely know the middle point. In other questions, such as Which of these definitions do you think describes the situation in Syria at best?, the reasons for the final option "I do not know" are asked in an open prompt "please justify". The open-ended questions usually follow to expand closed-ended ones, to

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[64] Oppenheim (1992), p. 200.
[65] Oppenheim (1992), p. 214.

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avoid generalisations or vagueness.

Only one question is left intentionally left vague to encourage respondents to freely express their views: What future do you expect for Syria? Questions on the political opinion of participants follow the Likert scale, for instance: A political program suitable for Syria. There is the risk that participants might experience psychological discomfort in remembering or talking about the Syrian conflict, for obvious reasons. Risks were managed, as stated by the Ethical Conduct in research (2007)[66], by avoiding questions touching the affective sphere (family), and focusing exclusively on the socio-political dimension. "Loaded" or emotive words were avoided in questions and none of them implied a judgment (good versus bad) from the interviewer and the interviewee. The risk is also balanced by the benefits the participants may gain from contributing to the project particularly a more aware sense of belonging to the group, and an emerging sense of empowerment from commenting on events in Syrian and from being able to express their voice.

Two major problems in the explanatory (analytical, hypothesis testing, not descriptive) survey seeking the explanation of phenomena in its relation to one or more independent variables are contamination and time order of variables.[67] To address time order, the survey included questions on the perception of the past, the present and the future in Syria. The reference to the time is made explicit in question wording. Hyman warns that in verbal procedures the respondent "symbolically creates or re-creates events thus locating the variables in the span of time rather than at the mere moment of measurement".[68] To avoid ambiguity of time, the questions contained an explicit indication of time using expressions such as at the moment, before the war, in the future.

To reduce the risks of contamination, which in Hyman's view is caused by pre-analytical and predetermined dependence amongst the variables[69], the following strategy was used: in the questions on the major ideological variables stemming from the theoretical framework – secularism, sectarianism, community identity – are independent variables. Relationships of dependence may result *a posteriori,* after the analysis of the responses. The theoretical and hypothetical phase has produced a form

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[66] National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) [Updated May 2015]:
https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines-publications/e72 (accessed 22 May 2016).
[67] Hyman (1966).
[68] Hyman (1966), p. 194.
[69] Hyman (1966), p. 181.

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of interrelation amongst the categories.

In particular, the hypothesis suggests that the level of secularism is in a relation of causation with the level of sectarianism. What is still to be defined is the type of causation [70] and proportionality (directly or inversely proportional relation). The mediating variable might be the level of the politicisation of the community, which creates a preference for secular or sectarian values. The production of hierarchies (superiority of one kind of values) is the most likely to generate conflict and exclusivity. On the contrary, a balance between secular and religious values would result in inclusivity in the group. Furthermore, community identity is likely to influence participation and vice versa, thus the two factors appear in mutual causation. However, theoretical interdependence is considered to be purely hypothetical, not to be transmitted into the design of the questions.

2.2 In-depth interviews

As Oppenheim outlines, the in-depth interview is the instrument which provides the highest level of spontaneity from the respondent.[71] The device requires the minimum intervention of the researcher who only introduces a theme and lets the respondent talk, only nodding and introducing another question after the respondent finishes talking.[72] Any questions asked should be as projective as possible such as: What do you consider the most appropriate…, or now what about…).[73] Concluding questions include "well, I think we have covered everything I needed to ask you" and final thank you and greetings, followed by "do you have any questions".[74]

The questions are not fully formulated or standardised, since their unique aim is to make the interviewee start talking. Further questions are not predetermined since they depend on the evolution of the conversation.[75] Determined *a priori* are only the topics the interviewer wants to cover. The interview aimed to uncover a description of the events in Syria before and after the war. The conversation was driven by the ideological aspects of modern political debate in Syria, focusing on the minority/majority issue. A prompting question was: Shall we talk about Syria before

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[70] Buckingham and Saunders (2004), p. 66.
[71] Oppenheim (1992), p. 68.
[72] Oppenheim (1992).
[73] Oppenheim (1992), p. 74.
[74] Oppenheim (1992), p. 75.
[75] Oppenheim (1992), p. 70.

and after the conflict from the political point of view? Before dealing with the minority/majority question, more direct questions with a short answer were asked: Do you belong to a Syrian minority? Which one?, followed by a more projective question such as: Do you know about the condition of your community?

Issues with in-depth interviews include the number of interviewees (how many) and where to conduct the interview. Oppenheim and Gilham suggest thirty or forty respondents (17 in-depth interviews and 95 interview-based questionnaires in this thesis, see section 2.8 in this chapter) and places in which it is less likely that the interviewee can be distracted or feel uncomfortable. In particular, noisy and public places should be avoided.[76] The interviews for the fieldwork were conducted in interview rooms of local libraries or in the rooms of the Syrian associations.

In-depth interviews were conducted with community organisations' leaders and members of the Syrian Armenian and Syrian Australian associations and their diasporic settlement in Australia and Armenia (in particular, in Sydney and Melbourne, where the concentration is higher according to the Census). Integration between the responses of the leaders and the members can be useful to evaluate empirical explanations of revival of religious and group identity. For example, Brian Lai argues that the negative side of religion, which tends to generate conflict, emerges on the high level of leaders; while the positive and constructive one emerges on the low level, when religion motivates population.[77]

2.3 Social observation

The interviews were correlated with social observation to present the research as a complete in-depth case study.[78] Participant observation, one of the most suitable methods for studying ethnic groups[79], aimed to measure levels of social interaction in the Syrian Armenian and Australian communities. It included the researcher's presence as an insider in everyday life settings frequented by exclusively Syrians in the case study countries. The observer's role included participating in social activities, mostly in easy-going conversations, waiting for services, having regular informal

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[76] Oppenheim (1992), p. 69.
[77] Lai, B. (2006). "An empirical examination of religion and conflict in the Middle East, 1950–1992." *Foreign Policy Analysis,* 2 (1), 21-36, p. 24.
[78] Jorgensen, D. (1989). *Participant observation: A methodology for human studies.* Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications.
[79] Jorgensen (1989).

meetings, and visiting Syrian Armenian shops. The identity as an observer was revealed to participants, but the researcher purely acted as an insider, with no inquisitive approach.

2.4 Case study selection

The research questions and hypotheses are answered through the two diasporic settings chosen as case studies: Armenia and Australia. Australia represents a more extensive case study, where different Syrian groups encountered the boundaries of multicultural policies, while Armenia represents the "influential case". Syrian Armenians are a prototypical diasporic group, considered external or averse to the idea of a Syrian homeland.[80] Their renewed experience of displacement is particularly interesting for an evaluation of Syrian identity loyalties and the re-construction of the Syrian homeland.

The selection of Armenia follows a specific case study selection criterion that is the *"influential case"*.[81] It is defined as "the case that proves the rule": a case that theoretically seems to invalidate a theory, but actually it does not.[82] Syrian Armenians have generally been considered as the most distant of all Syrians from a sense of belonging to Syria[83], something that apparently contradicts the hypothesis of strong attachments to Syria. This also challenges the essentialist assumption that ethnic and religious minorities are hostile to national integration. On the contrary, the Syrian Armenian attachment to the Syrian nation confirms the hypothesis that an inclusive national identity can emerge from the sub-state stratum.

Case study research is reliable in qualitative (with small-N[84]) studies.[85] For the study to have internal and external validity, "the reasons for including some cases and excluding others must be explicable".[86] Because of the impossibility of conducting empirical research in Syria[87], the target population of this thesis is restricted to the

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[80] Hourani (1947), p. 38.
[81] Gerring, J. (2007). *Case study research: Principles and practices.* Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 89. My emphasis. Gerring outlines 9 techniques: typical, diverse, extreme, deviant, influential, crucial, path-way, most similar, most different.
[82] Gerring (2007), p. 108.
[83] See Hourani (1982); Migliorino (2012); Payaslian (2007). See Chapter 4 for more details on Syrian Armenians .
[84] See above the justification for a limited number in the research design.
[85] Gerring (2007), p. 89.
[86] Gerring (2007), p. 82.
[87] Because of obvious safety issues, see above.

Syrian diaspora population in the two case study countries of Australia and Armenia. Despite the presence of two contexts, the cases belong to a single synchronical case study. Gerring explains that the latter may consist of two elements: an intensive case study and a more extensive analysis conducted on a larger scale.[88] In this thesis the extensive case is represented by the study in Australia, and the intensive case by the study in Armenia. Unlike Syrian-descent people in Australia, Syrian-born people in Armenia share the exclusive Armenian ethnicity and the Christian religion.

2.5 Influential case study: Armenians of Syria in Armenia

In 2011, there were an estimated 100,000 Armenians in Syria. The migration of Syrian Armenians to Armenia resulting from the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011 represents a small but important portion of the Syrian refugee crisis or Syrian diaspora. It is estimated 17,000 Syrian Armenians fled to Armenia in the between 2011 and 2016[89], with most of them applying for either Armenian citizenship (5,000) or permanent residency (with 8,000 granted a ten year special Armenian passport). The remaining 3,000 or so applied for formal refugee status, with the majority residing formally as Armenian citizens but in a refugee-like situation in need of humanitarian assistance. [90] Other estimates indicate approximately 17,000 Syrian Armenians fled to Lebanon leaving between 60,000 and 70,000 Syria-born Armenians still in Syria in 2015.[91]

With its acceptance of migrants from Syria, Armenia claimed to join other European and non-European countries in actions to address the Syrian refugee crisis. [92] Unlike other countries, Armenia only attracted Syrians with Armenian descent (with a few exceptions of mixed backgrounds). The reasons reflect the special treatment of Syrians with Armenian background as citizens, as a form of repatriation, a return to the place of origin, ethnically speaking. The return is actually an imagined one, since so-called returnees had never been in Armenia before. Even their ancestors,

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[88] Gerring (2007), p. 22.
[89] UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Armenia) estimates that in 2015 17,000 Syrian Armenians have fled to Armenia of the 70,000 Armenians estimated to be in Syria before 2011, http://www.unhcr.org/en-au/news/latest/2015/8/55cafe526/nansen-legacy-lives-syrian-refugees-armenia.html. (accessed 12 September 2016).
[90] Zolyan, M. (2015). "Refugees or repatriates? Syrian Armenians' return to Armenia". *Opendemocracy*: https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/mikayel-zolyan/refugees-or-repatriates-syrian-armenians-return-to-armenia. (accessed 27 September 2016).
[91] Zolyan (2015).
[92] https://armenpress.am/eng/news/827452/armenia-shows-europe-how-to-welcome-refugees.html

who are likely to be victims of the Armenian Genocide deported from Anatolia to Syria in 1915, were not born on Armenian soil.[93]

This diaspora policy is consistent with the pan-Armenian discourse that sees the Armenian diaspora as a "continuation of the country" in the "one Homeland, one Nation" discourse.[94] However, the assimilation of diaspora is highly problematic or even "dangerous" in the eyes of Armenian elites.[95] Despite easy-to-make predictions about the settlement of Syrian Armenians in Armenia, general dissatisfaction, lack of integration or in some cases discrimination is emerging, as shown in Chapter 4. Syrian Armenians are a unique group as a case study to evaluate the dichotomy between sub-national and national loyalties.

Armenians in Syria are commonly described as attempting to construct a little Armenia in Syria, a separate Armenian identity.[96] In the literature on Syrian Armenians, the maintenance of the Armenian background is often seen as a sign of lack of integration and/or disaffection for Syria and Syrian nationalism. Conversely, from the Armenian political perspective, the historic Armenian community in Syria represents a "bridge between the Armenian Republic and Middle Eastern countries", and Syrian Armenians are perceived as not living in ghettos, but "fully integrated in the host country [Syria]".[97]

Three decades ago, Hourani, talking about the fears and aspirations of minorities in Syria, predicted that Syrian Armenians would sooner or later voluntarily return to Caucasus[98] as Armenians and Kurds were at best "alien" and at worst "hostile" to Syrian nationalism, developing their own parallel nationalisms. Now the Armenian return from Syria to Caucasus is occurring, the intrinsic reasons for Hourani's prophecy on Syrian Armenians do not appear so obvious.

Despite their limited presence in the Syrian government and underrepresentation in political institutions[99], there is the rise to prominence of the Armenian community,

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[93] A parallel phenomenon is that of Jewish returnees to the state of Israel. Safran, W. (2005). "The Jewish Diaspora in a comparative and theoretical perspective." *Israel Studies,* 10 (1), 29-45, p. 36.
[94] Gasparyan, A. (2016). "The Armenian Political Elite's Approaches and Beliefs in Foreign Policy" in Kakachia, K. and Markarov, A. (eds.). *Values and identity as sources of foreign policy in Armenia And Georgia.* Tbilisi: Universal, p. 211.
[95] Gasparyan (2016).
[96] Nicola, M. (2012). "'Kulna Suriyyin' ? The Armenian community and the State in contemporary Syria." *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, pp. 115-116.
[97] Gasparyan (2016)*,* p. 217.
[98] Hourani, A. (1947). *Minorities in the Arab world.* London: Oxford University Press, p. 38.
[99] Mouawad, R. J. (2001). "Syria and Iraq—Repression". *Middle East Quarterly,* 8 (1), 51.

mostly in the private sector[100], and the emergence of an established middle class in the largest city of Aleppo.[101] In Aleppo alone, in 2011 there were 1,300 businesses owned and operated by Syrian Armenians.[102] Their skills enabled them to integrate in the Syrian economic system and enjoy an excellent reputation in the entire region. They transferred their business skills, identifying and filling "gaps, meeting market needs, delivering excellent customer service and supported by a flexible economic market driven system".[103] One instance of Armenian excellence is described by Dira:

> One example of skills transferred through non-formal apprentices is jewellery making; Syrian Armenian jewellery craftsmen were known throughout the Middle East, Northern Africa and other counties as top level gold and silver artisans, what was learned came from hours spent with their fathers and grandfathers.[104]

Even though they did not receive formal training and support by the state, the key for the success of Armenians in Syria was a form of private assistance by the family, the Armenian community, local neighbourhoods and other businesspeople. The two elements of involvement in Syrian civil society and preservation of Armenian identity do not always compete with each other. On the contrary, the dialectic between the two led to the construction of a Syrian Armenian identity, which widely describes the Syrian Armenian community as the "motherland".[105]

The streets of Yerevan, the capital of Armenia and the supposed motherland for Armenians, in the places in which Syrian Armenians are now concentrated, have the atmosphere of a little Syria in Armenia. The idea of the "predominance" of the Armenian identity over the Syrian must be reconsidered.[106] Identity preservation in the Syrian Armenian case is better explained as an effect of the 1915 Genocide. Hourani referred to "persecution mania" of Armenians after the Genocide.[107] Away from the negative connotation of the word "mania", the influence of the Genocide on Armenians is also the interest of the historical trauma literature that considers Armenian-ness as profoundly affected by the legacy of the Genocide and the risks of annihilation, to which family and church simultaneously responded with the

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[100] Mouawad (2001).
[101] Payaslian, S. (2007). "Diasporan subalternities: The Armenian community in Syria." *Diaspora,* 16 (1-2), 92-132, p. 109.
[102] Dira, R. (2015). *Problem Analysis and Measures to Improve and Support the Economic Integration of Syrian Refugees in Armenia.* German Agency for International Cooperation, p. 49.
[103] Dira (2015), p. 43.
[104] Dira (2015).
[105] http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34210854
[106] Migliorino (2012), p. 18.
[107] Hourani (1947), p. 118.

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commitment of Armenian identity preservation.[108] According to Panossian, the diasporan version of Armenian identity is centred on Church, Language and the recognition and memory of the Genocide.[109]

The Genocide also had an impact on the construction of the Armenian homeland. As Imranli-Lowe points out, the "real" Armenian homeland is the Turkish Armenian or Eastern Anatolia, while the historical Armenian homeland is a vast area from the Mediterranean to Garabogh in current Azerbaijan".[110] The process of Armenian construction of homeland is dated back to the seventh Century onwards.[111] In the Ottoman period (late 1800s), the Armenians lived in an administrative autonomous district.[112] The Ottoman wars, along with the Russian–Persian war (1826-1828) and, most importantly the Turkish Genocide, shaped the territory of the present-day Armenian Republic.[113] The Russian occupation and what Imranli-Lowe calls "expansionist plans of Christian Russia towards South Caucasus" was another factor for the reconstruction of Armenian homeland not including Eastern Anatolia.[114]

Grigor Suny observes that "the new, modern, rationalized Armenia encountered the limits of a Soviet reality".[115] The limits even after independence have consisted of obstacles for a full "social and economic modernization" and a "political switch toward fuller democracy".[116] Consequently, the Armenian economy is one of the most disadvantaged of the post-Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Lack of adequate housing, limited job opportunities and unsatisfactory work conditions go hand in hand with the frustration of territorial losses.[117] Suny's description also conveys the ethnic frustration of Armenians: "Armenians might have preferred another Armenia, another social system, another time or place, but this appeared a utopian dream".[118]

The utopian retrospective vision, to use Tsolidis's term[119], created a dichotomy between a form of pragmatism by Armenians of Soviet Armenia, trying to build a

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[108] See also Bakalian (1993) and Kupelian (1987).
[109] Panossian, R. (2006). *The Armenians: from Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars.* Columbia University Press.
[110] Imranli-Lowe, K. (2015). "Reconstruction of the 'Armenian homeland' notion." *Middle Eastern Studies,* 51 (4), 540-562, p. 541.
[111] Panossian (2006).
[112] See Chapter 3.
[113] Imranli-Lowe (2015), p. 550.
[114] Imranli-Lowe (2015), p. 551.
[115] Suny (1993), p. 190.
[116] Suny (1993).
[117] Suny (1993), p. 179.
[118] Suny (1993), p. 191.
[119] Tsolidis, G. (ed.) (2014). *Migration, diaspora and identity: Cross-national experiences.* Dordrecht; New York: Springer;

nation through compromises between restitution and defence of lands, and diaspora Armenians, "embarrassed"[120] by the sovietisation of Armenia and still dreaming a state at the base of Ararat. Furthermore, Armenia is ethnically the most homogenous of the Soviet republics but the economically and politically most "unfortunate", "with nearly a quarter of the population homeless, victims of political and natural earthquakes", as Suny claims. [121] The current Syrian Armenian refugees are encountering a welcoming country as far as administrative matters are concerned, with visa, passport and permanent residency or citizenship granted to them. However, the Republic of Armenia is less hospitable in job, trade and stability opportunities.

Armenia is a country that implements diaspora engagement policies towards diaspora communities, with a dedicated ministry. The phenomenon of calling Armenians from outside Armenia or accepting Armenian refugees (another instance was the Baku massacres with Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan[122]) is not new in Armenian history with historical precedents of ethnic repatriation.[123] Only 50% of the world's Armenians live in Armenia, while Syrian Armenians come from one-quarter of 33% that were living outside the ex-USSR.[124]

The acceptance of refugees is a form of religious and ethnic solidarity. However, the assistance to Syrian Armenians also has international political implications.[125] On the one hand, their presence in the Armenia justified the demand of resources from the international community. On the other hand, the Syrian Armenian community in Syria has a key role in Armenian economic and political interests in the Middle East.[126] Armenian elites consider Syrian Armenians as having a political and economic significance for bridging Armenia and Syria.[127]

As a hypothesis, in the migration to the ancestral homeland, **a higher degree of homogeneity and concentration in the Syrian Armenian group is predictable. In addition, the maintenance of the link with the home country, Syria, is expected to go beyond birth, including social and political affiliations.** Despite their formal status as Armenian citizens or permanent residents, Syrian Armenians seemingly

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[120] Suny (1993), p. 243.
[121] Suny (1993), p. 244.
[122] On Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan see Hovannisian (1971), pp. 187-200.
[123] Suny (1993), p. 216.
[124] Suny (1993), p. 214.
[125] Gasparyan (2016), p. 213.
[126] Gasparyan (2016), p. 214.
[127] Gasparyan (2016).

confirm tendencies, generally expressed by refugees, of "exile" and "willing to return to the home country".[128] For Syrian Armenians in Syria the Armenian identity seemed to prevail, while it is seemingly reversed in Armenia where the Syrian identity prevails.

The maintenance of the link with Syria is testified by the creation of Syrian Armenian community associations in Yerevan. One is called "Aleppo NGO" with an explicit reference to the hometown of most of the Syrian Armenian returnees.[129] It is titled a "compatriotic" association, a definition that denotes a common *patria* with the meaning of "homeland or "land of the fathers". Another association is the "Centre for the Coordination of Syrian Armenian Issues".[130] The two have the common purpose of providing assistance to migrants from Syria who fled the conflict, by meeting basic needs, providing psychological support and cultural mediation for the settlement in Armenia.

Ultimately, the integration in *Hayastan* (translating into "Armenia") should be easier for Syrian Armenians because of elements for a better identification, such as the same ethnic, linguistic and religious background.[131] Culturally, Armenian society does not represent a totally unfamiliar environment for Syrian-Armenian refugees. However, Syrian Armenians in Armenia share some elements with other Syrian refugees and, despite their formal status of citizens, their integration in Armenian society is not completely facilitated due to social and economic difficulties.

2.6 Extensive case study: The Syrian community of Australia

The number of Syrians in Australia has multiplied between 2011 and 2016, going from 13,0000 to probably (statistics after 2011 are not available) nearly 40,000. According to UNHCR, Australia accepted two intakes of 12,000 Syrian and Iraqi refugees in 2015-2016.[132] The humanitarian program does not distinguish between the Syrian and the Iraqi crises, with the program covering both Syrian and Iraqi displaced

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[128] Gasparyan (2016), p. 279.
[129] https://aleppo-ngo.org/ (accessed 6 October 2016)
[130] https://www.spyur.am/en/companies/center-for-coordination-of-syrian-armenians-issues/30327 (accessed 6 October 2016).
[131] Tsolidis, G. (ed.) (2014). *Migration, diaspora and identity: Cross-national experiences*. Dordrecht; New York: Springer; Wald, K. D. (2008). "Homeland interests, hostland politics: Politicized ethnic identity among Middle Eastern heritage groups in the United States." *International Migration Review,* 42 (2), 273-301.
[132] https://www.dss.gov.au/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/programs-policy/syrian-and-iraqi-refugee-crisis/refugee-settlement-media-hub (accessed on 23 February 2015).

people.

Since 2011, Syrians in Australia have started to create their own associations, mostly in response to the refugee crisis. With the growth of refugee numbers and their gradual settlement, different Syrian Australian associations have emerged to provide help to people inside and outside Syria, promote Syrian culture and take a stand in the current conflict. The nature of the associations is very interesting, since it reflects in a simplified way the political polarisation in exile of Syrian people at home. Syrian identity in Australia is starting to distinguish itself from the wider umbrella of Arab and/or Lebanese identity. Australian multiculturalism is useful to offer a background on Syrians in Australia and to hypothesise its effects on the maintenance and re-construction of Syrian diaspora identity.

In Australia, multicultural policies of a society based on "large scale immigration" since the early 1970s have been directed to manage cultural and ethnic diversity as an advantage, rather than an obstacle to national identity.[133] Australian multicultural policies are based on the recognition of ethnic and cultural (including religious) diversity alongside that of common institutions, rights and obligations.[134] As Moran points out, after 1980, Australia was "transformed, remade and reinvented, in order to fit perceived global realities, especially realities of the economic variety".[135]

Australia has been defined as a "complex place" to be in terms of identity.[136] The complexity is also related to the difficulty of being in Australia, becoming and being Australian. There is no fixed answer on what being Australian means. Australian identity is widely seen as "ambivalent"[137], to the extent that rather than identity scholars refer to Australian character, to the plural "identities"[138] or "Australian way of life"[139] which includes both "hard work" and "laziness", both "fair go" and "self-congratulation".[140] As Kukathas notes, in Australia there is a strong presence of the

[133] Kukathas, C. (1993) (ed.). *Multicultural citizens: the philosophy and politics of identity*. St. Leonards, N.S.W: Multicultural Research Program, Centre for Independent Studies.
[134] Kukathas (1993)*, p. 52.
[135] Moran (2005), p. 8.
[136] Moran (2005), p. 206.
[137] Hage, G. (2002). "Multiculturalism and white paranoia in Australia." *Journal of International Migration and Integration,* 3 (3), 417-437, p. 418.
[138] Jacobs (2011), p. 82. See also Hage (2003) and Turner (2003).
[139] Greig, A. (2013). *The Australian way of life: A sociological introduction.* South Yarra, Vic.: Palgrave Macmillan.
[140] McLean, L. (2008). "The march to nation: Citizenship, education, and the Australian way of life in New South Wales, Australia, 1940s-1960s". *History of Education Review,* 37 (1), 34-47, p. 35.

national border, but national identity is undefined, rather he speaks of a "national character"[141] which is composed of "invented different identities at different times, to serve various interests".[142] Australian national identity exists in the sense that the population identifies with the "political or community".[143]

The vagueness of the term Australian identity, and the variety of articulations, is also reflected by different political interpretations of Australian identity, particularly evident in the "neoliberal paradox", in the debate between Prime Minister John Howard and his rival Paul Keating in the late 1990s. While Howard advocated for a strong, compelling national identity sympathetic to Liberal Party ideology, Keating saw the lack of a single cultural heritage as the major feature of Australian identity and uniqueness, a basis for democratic and pluralist values.[144] Jacobs notes that, as a result of the implementation of the "National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia" (1989), Australian politicians avoid engaging with an interpretation of Australian national identity, because they do not consider it fruitful in electoral terms.[145]

Multiculturalism, however conceived, is a political instrument for dealing with identities, both for constructing Australian national identity and for managing diversity, migration policies and social heterogeneity. Similarly, as Hage points out, the exploitation of the "white colonial paranoia" follows a political agenda and results from economic and political circumstances[146], and feeds class-based anxiety.[147] In moving from the "White Australia policy" (which comprises legislations for restricting immigration, particularly of non-Europeans in 1901, to Australia and was progressively dismantled between 1949 and 1973)[148] to multiculturalism, multiculturalism was conceived in "both descriptive and prescriptive" terms.[149] Hage explains that, on the one hand, the prescriptive nature was endorsed by politics as the inescapable necessity to manage a multi-ethnic society.[150] On the other hand, the descriptive imperative was left to Australian society, in the process of shaping "life-change multiculturalism" by incorporating multicultural identity into Australian

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[141] Kukathas (1993), p. 148.
[142] Kukathas (1993).
[143] Kukathas (1993), p. 149.
[144] The debate is fully reported by Jacobs (2011), pp. 83-84.
[145] Jacobs (2011), p. 85.
[146] Hage (2002), p. 417.
[147] Hage (2002), p. 420.
[148] See also Windschuttle, K. (2004). *The White Australia policy.* Paddington, N.S.W.: Macleay Press.
[149] Hage (2002), p. 427.
[150] Hage (2002),

national identity.[151]

Despite the positive effects of multiculturalism on identity and culture preservation, difficulties include its potential divisiveness[152] and episodes of racist attitudes, including "panic" about the Muslim community, also from the Middle East.[153] During the Gulf War (1991), the target of discrimination was the Arab community, as described by Wakim.[154] Graffiti with expressions "Arabs out of the country" and threats to a prominent Sydney mosque were not uncommon.[155] After 9/11 in 2001, the war in Iraq and the emergence of groups like ISIS, the Muslim community has increasingly become the target of discrimination. In Hage's words, "September 11 sealed the position of the Muslim as the unquestionable aggressive enemy other in Australia today".[156] New research on Arab Australian identity confirms the evidence of rising Islamophobia post 9/11, of reported experiences of discrimination, and of "resisting the homogenisation of Arabs" in Australian society.[157]

In the public meaning of multiculturalism, the Australian government outlines its multicultural principles as the recognition of ethnic, cultural and religious diversity, and participation in the "social, economic and cultural life" of Australia under the "national legal framework".[158] There is no mention of political life, in the sense that diversity does not influence political participation. The political community is where Australian identity manifests itself, leaving aside cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds. The secular nature of the Australian state also tends to exclude religious affiliations from the political arena and confine them in the private sphere.[159]

Complexities of Australian pluralist and secular political programs in the management of diversity and immigration policies include differences within multicultural policies, as noticed by Hage, in particular, "differences between multiculturalism as welfare and as a structural socioeconomic policy", and "differences between multiculturalism as social policy described above and

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[151] Hage (2002), p. 428.
[152] Kukathas (1993), p. 53.
[153] Moran (2005), p. 208.
[154] Wakim, J. (2013). *Sorry we have no space*. Ballarat (VIC): Connor Court Publishing.
[155] Wakim (2013), p. 7.
[156] Hage (2002), p. 435.
[157] Liuzzo, C. (2016). *Contesting Arab-Australian Identity: through a study on Egyptian Australians and the Arab Spring.* Macquarie University: PhD Dissertation, pp. 8-9.
[158] https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/12_2013/people-of-australia-multicultural-policy-booklet.pdf
[159] Hage (2002), p. 416.

multiculturalism as cultural policy". [160] To sum up, while there is diversity in Australian cultural life, the same involvement does not occur in access to socio-economic resources and access to state and institutions. The welfare state is considered as "a tool for dealing with the structural class inequalities produced by Australian society around ethnicity". [161] Access to resources is in part facilitated "in the form of interpreting services or providing state help to ethnic communities in the form of specific grants". [162]

As Humphrey observes, the gap has been filled by immigrants' organisations that represent the medium for working-class immigrants to be "incorporated into Australian political and social structures". [163] Cultural, ethnic and religious associations mediate between the groups they represent at civil society level and the political environment in which they have been involved and express their demands. They might also maintain a link with the political life of the home country.

Humphrey calls the mediation role of immigrants' associations as "local community politics". [164] For empirical research, interviews with representatives of Australian Syrian associations are essential for understanding such politics and any link with Syrian politics. Community service provision and welfare is also an area of Australian state involvement. As Allison points out, "the churches play an invaluable role in providing care to often neglected sectors of the community". [165]

Humphrey also mentions laws regulating associations as legal entities, "attracting state financial support" and "control on their activities". [166] He notes that the state preference of "legally established organizations with existing authority structures and hierarchies and with broad cultural appeal" influences the religious and/or cultural life and values of the community. [167] Under legal and financial control, religious organizations became engaged in delivering services that were formerly provided by provincial governmental agencies. [168] They also are well integrated into immigrant

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[160] Hage (2002), p. 417.
[161] Hage (2002), p. 428.
[162] Hage (2002).
[163] Humphrey, M. (1984). "Community disputes violence and dispute processing in a Lebanese Muslim immigrant community." *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law,* 16(22), 53-88.
[164] Humphrey (1984), p. 56.
[165] Allison, L. 2014. "Religion and Politics: Opportunity or Threat?" www.rationalist.com.au/ religion-and-politics-opportunity-or-threat (Accessed on November 22, 2018). On the debate surrounding entanglement of religion and politics in Australia see also Warhurst (2014) and McAllister (2011).
[166] Humphrey (1984), p. 57.
[167] Humphrey (1988).
[168] Allison (2014).

communities. Jiang explains the tight connection between community and religious membership:

> The majority of immigrants who come to Australia are religious, according to Australian Bureau of Statistics, and immigrants also are clustered in several metropolitan centers. Those who choose to participate in a Christian religious group tend to choose a local community of worship (Kaldor et al. 1999), which would in principle connect religious institutions to immigrant communities and facilitate the integration of religious institutions into immigrant communities. Throughout Australia's colonial history local religious institutions have been an instigating force in driving immigrants to engage in civic activities for community benefit.[169]

Dealing with the Sunni Lebanese community of Australia, Humphrey points out: "The multiplicity of Sunni immigrant organizations was not merely a reflection of the fragmented character of the Lebanese Muslim communities in Lebanon".[170] It is predictable that the same is valid for Syrian immigrant organisations in Australia: the presence of different associations does not only reflect divisions in Syria but is also the result of the Australian multicultural context in which they were founded.

Religious institutions in Australia also have a role "in consolidating ethnic loyalties and perpetuating cultural traditions".[171] In general, religious identity and institutions provide for therapeutic needs and meanings after frustration, becoming an important component of self-concept.[172] The experience of the forced or unforced diaspora, the feeling of marginality in the first arrival to the new country, and the need for survival in mainstream groups can create a self-esteem vacuum that can be filled by pre-existing attachments. For Syrians in Australia, such attachments are pre-existing in a double sense: they are given by ancestry in the home country and re-found in the institutions of the host country. This is particularly evident for Armenians, whose community was established in Sydney and Melbourne in the 1960s and has grown to approximately 50,000 Armenians in Australia.[173]

In 2011 there were an estimated 13,517 Syrian-born people in Australia.[174] As in Armenia, the immigration of Syrians before 2011 was low compared to other communities such as the Lebanese. Reasons for immigration included: job

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[169] Jiang, L. (2017)." Does Religious Attendance Increase Immigrant Political Participation?: A Case Study in Australia." *Religion and Politics,* 10(2), 440-460, p. 443.

[170] Humphrey (1988), p. 261.

[171] Kukathas (1993)*,* p. 3.

[172] Kukathas (1993).

[173] Armenian General Benevolent Union (2001). *The Armenian community today & tomorrow: Armenian community survey*. NSW: Armenian General Benevolent Union.

[174] Australian Bureau of Census. *People of Australia* (2011). (Ancestry: Armenian) https://www.border.gov.au/ReportsandPublications/Documents/research/people-australia-2013-statistics.pdf (accessed 15 February 2015).

opportunities, escape from military service, and education. Syrians in Australia were not organised in an autonomous NGO or community service. As estimated by the Australian Census, the geographic composition of Syrian-born people in Australia is similar to that of the Lebanese community, with a higher concentration residing in suburbs of Sydney (Lakemba, Bankstown and Fairfield) and Melbourne (Hume).[175] Statistics report:

> A larger number of people – just under 14,000 – indicated Syrian ancestry at the 2011 Census. Almost half of these were born in Australia, with most of the rest from Syria and Lebanon. Interestingly only about half of those born in Syria indicated Syrian ancestry, with the rest being primarily a mix of Assyrian (the ancient bronze age empire from which the country is named) and Armenian (evidence that Syria itself has taken in large numbers of refugees from the Armenian genocide a century ago).[176]

In order to avoid confusion about different backgrounds (Syrian, Assyrian, Armenian, Alawite), the prerequisite for participation in the thesis research was "Syrian-born" rather than "Syrian background". In the responses to identity affiliations, participants were able to classify their different backgrounds. The results of the qualitative research may be different to statistical data. The 2011 Australian Census refers to the religious heterogeneity of Syrian Australians as 35% Islam, 16% Catholic, 7% Greek Orthodox, 6% Armenian Apostolic, 4% Syrian Orthodox, 3% Druse and 3% with no religion.[177]

Within Syrian Christians, Armenians are divided into Catholic, Apostolic and Evangelical Armenians. The definition of the Armenian Church as "orthodox" is not accurate, since the Church of Armenia defines itself as "Apostolic" (the denomination is similar to orthodox, but they have subtly different spiritual beliefs). In the 2016 Australian census, the Armenian Church agreed to be classified as "Armenian Apostolic" under the "Oriental Orthodox" denomination to form a bloc with the other Oriental Orthodox churches of Australia (Coptic, Syrian, Ethiopian).[178] Not all Armenians in Australia are Syrian, because the Armenia diaspora after the First World War led to the spread of Armenians all over the world. The settlement in Australia of Armenians from Middle Eastern countries began in that period, but the real migratory stream set after the Second World War. Most Armenians came from Middle Eastern countries or Europe, after having already settled there because of the Armenian

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[175] Australian Bureau of Census (2011).
[176] Australian Bureau of Census (2011).
[177] Australian Bureau of Census (2011).
[178] Australian Bureau of Census (2016).
http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2901.0Chapter8302016

Genocide, which pushed them out of eastern Turkey in 1915. There were around 16,000 [179] Armenian Australians in the 2011 Census, and they come from many different diaspora countries: Armenia, Egypt, Iran, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Israel, Turkey and India. Armenian community associations and Church estimated them to considerably higher in number reporting 50,000 Armenians in Australia, residing primarily in Sydney and Melbourne. [180]

There were also nearly 4,000 Alawis in Australia[181], classified in the Census as a group with "Lebanese background". [182] The latter classification is not entirely accurate, since when the first wave of immigration from Syria took place, many Alawis came from the territories around Tripoli that at the time belonged to Syria and not Lebanon. Australian Alawis are suffering echoes of the Syrian conflict. For instance, *The Australian* reported of "Alawite attacks" in Australia on 26 June 2012: "Syria violence erupts here as fearful Alawis lay the blame on Carr: the small Alawite community in Australia say they have been targeted by vicious 'jihadist' attacks as the bloody Syrian conflict spills over into Arabic communities in Sydney and Melbourne".[183] This is a sign of the presence of Syria-related dynamics in Australia. The interviews with the Australian Alawite community evaluate the actuality of these events and possible reactions.

Syrian immigrants have a generally high level of education, with 14.2% graduates (holding a Bachelor degree). The average age with the majority of people aged between 40 and 55 years suggests the immigration wave of Syrians took place in the late 1970s and 1980s. The trend is justified by two coincident factors: the end of the "White Australia policy" in the 1970s, with government policy on migrants called "A multicultural society for the future"[184] in 1973. In particular, Syrians fitted well into the "selective" approach of Australian immigration policies, in search of "labour supply" and "high levels of capital and skills". [185] The immigration of Syrians increased after 2011, with the intake of refugees conforming to the international obligations of the UN's Convention of 1951 and the protocol of 1967.

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[179] Australian Bureau of Census (2011).Ancestry: Armenian
[180] Armenian National Committee of Australia.
http://www.anc.org.au/community
[181] Hage (2002).
[182] Australian Bureau of Census (2011).
[183] Rintoul, S. (2012). "Syria violence erupts here as fearful Alawis lay the blame on Carr." *The Australian*, 26 June 2012.
[184] Kukathas (1993), p. 51.
[185] Moran, A. (2005). *Australia: Nation, belonging, and globalization*. New York: Routledge, p. 177.

Because of the absence of recent empirical work on the Syrian Australia community and the community's small size, hypotheses are also drawn from the literature on Lebanese and Arab Australians. Similar to the results of studies on Lebanese people in Australia[186], it is predicted that Syrian people form a "dual identity,[187] describing themselves as both Syrian and Australian. More than two multiple attachments are also possible. This is likely to confirm the multi-layered nature of Syrian identity, and its liminal space in the negotiation with ethno-religious attachments, national homeland and host country. The maintenance of group and national loyalties will influence the political orientation of the participants.

In Sydney and Melbourne, five Syrian Australian associations are the main actors in the activism towards Syria. In Sydney, the Syrian Australian Association based in Lakemba where there is the highest concentration of Syrians had a political scope in its statement: "The Australian Syrian Community have come together on regular intervals to hold peaceful demonstrations in NSW to show their support for the people of Syria, in their struggle for freedom and democracy".[188] The association was founded in 2011, coincidently with the beginning of the so-called "Syrian revolution" and ceased activities in 2013, the date when the Syrian uprising formally became an international conflict.

A similar institution is the Australian Syrian Association of Victoria (ASAVIC) which has a mission statement similar to the one above: "The ASAVIC is a non-profit organisation established in 2011 to foster a stronger relationship among all Australian-Syrians, and to support and advocate democratic movement, call for freedom and human rights in Syria and all around the world".[189] The two Syrian associations in Sydney and Melbourne provide a clear example of echoes of appeals of democracy and social justice that characterised the early Syrian uprising of 2011. The two have positioned themselves as continuations of the unrest with the main objective of raising awareness about the freedom and democratic governance.

A third association founded later in 2015, the Syrian Community Association, states it has a clear apolitical mission, focusing on Syrian settlement in Australia. Two additional institutions in Australia's major cities are Australian Associations of Syrian

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[186] On the Lebanese community of Australia, see also Noble and Tabar (2002), Wills (2005) and Moran (2009).
[187] Jacobs, K. (2011). *Experience and representation: Contemporary perspectives on migration in Australia*. Farnham, England: Ashgate, p. 89.
[188] http://theaustraliansyrianassociation.org/ (accessed on 18 March 2015).
[189] http://asavic.org.au/about/

Christians of Sydney and Melbourne. The two, along with the Assyrian and Armenian communities, have joined a number of Christian actors active in refugee service provision. As Wilson points out, churches have been established in Australia for a long period and have acquired resources and substantial expertise in service provision that enable them to step into the refugee sector.[190]

Hence, it is hypothesised that **Syrian community associations do not only reflect the ethno-religious divisions of Syrian society, but are also influenced by the pre-existing Australian system of community regulation. Both the sectarianisation of the conflict in Syria and the pre-existence of already institutionalised community religious associations other than Syrian ones accentuate divisions across the Syrian community at large.** The extent of influence on the formation of Syrian identity is complex to evaluate, but it is not automatically assumed that Syrian identity is weaker in Australia. The new emergence of a Syrian community in Australia seems to confirm the persistence of Syrian attachments despite a superficial prevalence of religious identity over the Syrian identity in Australia.

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[190] Wilson, E. (2014). "Theorizing religion as politics in postsecular international relations.' *Politics, Religion & Ideology,* 15(3), 347-365, p. 360.

2.7 Ethical issues

The research was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Macquarie University (approval no. 5201600249, 5 August 2016).

The selection of people with Syrian background followed probability sampling, also called random sampling.[191] A selection according to the background nationality (Syrian) and ethnicity of participants was essential for the purposes of the research. However, any judgment about religious beliefs was totally avoided, as religious "respect" is a central value according to the Australian National Statement on Ethical conduct in Human Research (2007).[192] Discrimination was avoided in two ways: firstly, by providing all the groups with the same questionnaire and interview questions, with no difference according to religious or ethnic groups; and secondly, by equally representing the groups. "If equality is one important measure of the priority of research, then there should be more research among those who are vulnerable and/or disadvantaged"[193]

Aware of the challenges of conducting socio-political research with people having a direct or indirect link with the Syrian conflict, the researcher kept the lowest possible profile with the participants. The form of the in-depth interview is useful for this, with the minimum intervention of the enquirer, allowing confidentiality and spontaneous reactions.[194]

While the baseline of 'do no harm' is recognised as an important starting point in research with vulnerable groups directly or indirectly involved in a conflict situation, there is a growing sense that research should provide a relief from the suffering.[195] Questions were designed to make the participants feel empowered[196] by expressing their voices and their "needs"[197] resulting from the Syrian situation. Although the research did not directly provide social services to the target people (because it is

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[191] Buckingham, A. and Saunders, P. (2004). *The survey methods workbook: From design to analysis.* Cambridge: Polity.
[192] https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines-publications/e72
[193] Ramcharan (2006), p. 183.
[194] Oppenheim, A. (2001). *Questionnaire design, interviewing and attitude measurement* (New ed.). London; New York: Continuum, p. 88.
[195] Hugman, R., Bartolomei, L. and Pittaway, E. (2011). "Human agency and the meaning of informed consent: Reflections on research with refugees." *Journal of Refugee Studies,* 24 (4), 655-71.
[196] See also Butler (2002).
[197] Hugman, Bartolomei and Pittaway (2011).

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independently undertaken), the results may increase awareness of their essential demands and potentially contribute to the development of better policies and practices by governments and service providers.

A limited number of participants [198] also allows the researcher to establish a relationship with the participants. As Hugman argues, research with conflict related groups has to be considered as process and not seen as a single event: "It must involve dialogue with refugee community groups themselves in all aspects of the research, including the questions to be asked, techniques to be used, the interpretation of data and decisions about publication".[199] Contact details of the researcher were offered for tracking the research, and availability to participate in another event (interview) was asked. The recruitment of participants in different steps builds an in-progress relationship with participants: 1, researcher attends community events and gathering to make a first contact with eligible -18+ and Syrian background - interested in participation; 2, researcher is contacted by participants and arranges the survey; 3, the survey takes place; 4, the interview takes place with participants who express their availability during the survey.

When thinking about the events, family or relatives in Syria, participants might become emotional at a certain stage of the survey or interview. In the worst-case scenario, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSD) might affect some participants. PTSD can have long-term (months after) or even lifetime effects of anxiety and the process of remembering can worsen effects even though the trauma was in the past. Symptoms of PTSD may include irritability and anger, panic attacks, feelings of anxiety, excessive shame, and inability to concentrate.[200]As suggested by Pitman et al., PTSD symptoms are better managed when the participants are prepared for the stress.[201] Prior to starting the survey and the interview, participants were advised about the expected stress of remembering events and worrying about family in Syria and were kindly asked to avoid thinking about their personal memories, but to focus on the political situation in Syria.

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[198] 100 participants, for example, is suggested.
[199] Hugman, Bartolomei and Pittaway (2011), p. 280.
[200] Pitman, R., Marin, M., Vitek, M., Orr, S. and Goldberg, J. (2013). "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms and their relationship to trauma exposure." *Biological Psychiatry,* 73 (9), p. 62.
[201] Pitman et al. (2013), p. 68.

2.8 Summary of participants

The sample was chosen on a voluntary base and for a fair distribution, and no selection was made *ex ante* according to age, gender, education background, political party or social class. Members of the communities were invited to participate in an interview-based questionnaire and/or an in-depth interview (in some cases, by audio recording, with explicit consent of the participants, to capture the conversation while observing the paralinguistic cues of the respondent's behaviour).

The participants recognized me as a non-Syrian (Italian) Arabic-speaking researcher with a basic understanding of Armenian, including the difference between the two versions of the language spoken by Syrian Armenians and Armenians. As all diaspora Armenians, Syrian Armenians speak western Armenian, while Armenians in Armenia (and in the former Soviet Union and Iran) speak eastern Armenian.[202] A selection according to the background nationality (Syrian) and ethnicity of participants was essential for the purposes of the research. The limit of participants was 50 persons per each case study with a maximum total of 100 in Australia and 50 in Armenia, to manage the collection of data and analysis.

The recruitment process in Armenia resulted in 48 interview-based questionnaires completed by participants in a day-by-day selection. Eight participants, including three leaders of associations, agreed on an in-depth interview after the survey. The questions were answered individually (one to one approach), even within small groups of participants. Single participation in turns was essential to avoid non-spontaneity of results, biases and forced repetitions. Identical or very similar responses did not occur as the result of other participants' influence or other forms of influence. The researcher's role was to ask questions and paraphrase and explain questions the participant could not understand. Intervention was often required in the political questions that were the most likely to be left blank.

Armenian target population was well balanced in gender and age, with a slightly greater number of women (26 women versus 22 men), with a majority of middle age participants (40–60 years). Participants are employed in a wide range of professions, especially in own-businesses. A high unemployment rate has been noticed, higher in Armenia (27% of unemployed in Syria, 35% in Armenia, plus 20% of "home duties" in both countries). All the participants declared that they have lived in Armenia for less

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[202] On the historic divide between western and eastern Armenians see below…

than seven years. The number of Armenians from Syria residing in Armenia before 2011 was small.[203] The table below shows the composition of participants in Armenia:

Table 1. Sample grid for the study of Syrian Armenians in Armenia

Age group	Men	Women
18-25	1	1
26-40	5	6
41-60	5	9
60+	5	2
Subtotal	16	18
TOTAL 37		

In Australia, 37 people were recruited to complete the questionnaires. Nine participants, including five representatives of associations, agreed on an in-depth interview after the survey. In Australia, the recruitment process resulted in a majority of Christian participants. The age and gender composition is balanced with 19 women and 18 men, again with a slight majority of middle age participants, as shown in the table below:

Table 2. Sample grid for the study of Syrian-born Australians

Age group	Men	Women
18-25	5	2
26-40	7	6
41-60	7	16
60+	1	4
Subtotal	20	28
TOTAL 48		

Unlike Armenia, participants were employed in a great variety of jobs,[204] with a low level of unemployment. Years of residency outside Syria were different to Armenia, with 60% of participants living in Australia for more than 25 years and 29% for less than seven years. This was partly related to ethical concerns[205] about the recruitment of Syrians in Australia, since it would have been distressful to question formal refugees (with less than five years of residency) about Syrian political issues. In Armenia, there was the same concern but it was possible to recruit participants with more than five years residency because many Syrian Armenians fled to Armenia and were able to acquire a visa just after the first protests in early 2011. The process of

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[203] Imranli-Lowe (2015), p. 543.
[204] See Appendix 1.
[205] See the Preface and above Section 2.7 "Ethical concerns".

entry to Australia was longer and the greatest intake took place in 2013, so not many were eligible to participate in the study.

2.9 Analysis approaches

The analysis of lengthy contributions was done manually using NVivo, for instance, of the open responses that correspond to the option other than the suggested, comments on the selections amongst suggested ones instead, and the open-ended questions. A number of participants wrote down relatively long notes for closed-ended questions, where they thought that no provided option was representative of their views. These notes have been transcribed, translated and reported with the question responses. The two final open-ended questions were completed by almost all the participants, in some cases with many words.

The responses of the survey were also analysed manually and grouped according to the thematic structure of the thesis. Results are interpreted through the theoretical framework of identity theories outlined in chapter 3. In data analysis, the responses of the groups are compared according to the ethno-religious affiliation and any differences within the community taken into account. The interpretation of findings derived from a comparison of the responses with the related literature and theories.

During interpretation of results, the four categories of analysis resulted in "group or community identity", "national identity", "sectarianism" and "secularism". After a review within responses and across cases/individuals, it was possible to identify principal trends and patterns. All linkages that could be made to the relevant literature were reported. The analysis continued in the same manner for each analytic category, exhausting all possible interpretations, and drawing all the possible relationship between and amongst variables. When discrepancies in the patterns were noted if compered to the theoretical results, the enquiry sought the most plausible explanations. As a characteristic of qualitative research, ambiguity was tolerated in the final description of finding. Description preceded interpretation, following Patton. [206] The interview reports, figures and description of data were taken as evidence for building the argument of the thesis. In a later stage, interpretation involved attaching significance to the findings, considering different meanings, and

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[206] Patton (2002), p. 348.

offering final explanations and conclusions.[207]

After interviews, social observation and derivation of empirical evidence from the collected data, it was useful to follow an abductive method that stems from Aristotle's posterior analytics.[208] Aristotle, known to be a deductive epistemologist *par excellence,* noticed that in some cases, when axioms are not given, demonstration and deduction are not sufficient. Despite his overwhelming empiricism, he admitted a certain degree of uncertainty in knowledge, in his opinion to be supplied by intellectual intuition and induction throughout experience.

Aristotle thought of induction not simply in terms of grasping first principles, but more generally as "insight".[209] Following Aristotle, we learn that experience (through *nous* and *apagoge,* that is, perception of the truth, and inference, comparison and repetition – co-variation) can suggest reliable "leading basic principles". The results are "reliable", but not definitive, since the demonstration starts from particular premises, and not from "primitive general principles" or "immediates".[210]

The same can be said for the results of this study: the results have been reported in terms of theoretically meaningful variables, measured in ways that are themselves justifiable in terms of the relevant theories. The enquiry undertaken in this thesis produces imperfect knowledge, since it relies on argument and rhetoric rather than on argument and demonstration. The approach used for this thesis was not purely deductive, but rather a combination of deduction and induction, a form of abduction [211] for evidence derivation. The abductive method suits indirect and intuitive fields of analysis, in which there is not only one possible explanation for the facts, but rather a best explanation.

2.10 Conclusion

The research design used to address the research hypotheses is a qualitative approach with two case study countries: Australia and Armenia. Australia is an extensive case, and Armenia is an influential case. Data was collected through surveys, interviews with individuals and community associations, and social observation in both Australia

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[207] Patton (2000).

[208] Aristotle conceived science as a deductive system, starting from *archai* or basic beliefs. This is true for "exact sciences" like mathematics for instance, but not always in social sciences.

[209] Aristotle. (1976). *Aristotle's posterior analytics.* Translated [from the Greek] with notes by Jonathan Barnes. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 98.

[210] Aristotle (1976), p. 102.

[211] Fann, K. T. (1970). *Peirce's theory of abduction.* The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

and Armenia. Research participants are born in Syria and have migrated to Australia and Armenia in or before 2011.[212] The ethical issues of research in refugee and diasporic communities are acknowledged and addressed in several ways.

The research is analytic, it uses "interview-based" and "more complex" questions and so the number of respondents is restricted to manage the data[213] for "practical reasons of economy or facilitating the research process".[214] When social research is analytical and selective, and it takes into account homogeneous population (all with Syrian background in this research) and sub-groups (Syrian and Syrian diaspora communities), a small sample can still be precise. [215]

One possible error of the social research is that of *depersonalising* the individual in the group, overestimating group identity and ignoring personal identity.[216] The following chapter addresses such issues focusing on approaches towards identity and on postmodern itinerant and non-reductionist perspectives for incorporating subjectivity in socio-political research.

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[212] Appendix 1 shows years of settlement of participants.
[213] Fann (1970), p. 71.
[214] Hyman, H. (1966). *Survey design and analysis: Principles, cases, and procedures.* Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, p. 86.
[215] A sample size of 100 in a heterogeneous population will produce a degree of imprecision (sample error) of 10%,[215] but in a homogenous population, the sample error tends to be reduced.[215] Buckingham and Saunders (2004), p. 113.
[216] Gerring (2007), p. 32.

Chapter 3. Approaches to Syrian identity and politicisation of identity

A classification of Syrian identities is complex, because of the complementary presence of different criteria for the identification of groups. Ethnicity, which in Syria directly refers to "group identity",[217] is composed of different factors: religion, language, historic tradition, culture (in the extensive meaning) and persecution. "Territoriality", for instance, is an important element for the definition of ethnicity in the Druze and in the Alawi community. The kaleidoscopic nature of Syrian groups is also well represented by Antoun: "The terms 'Alawi' or 'Shia' refer not simply to an ethnic identity or a religious ideology, but also to a territory, a politico-economic system, a wide-ranging cultural repertoire, and a history".[218] For Syrian groups, ethnicity is not only about "blood" and "race".[219] Ethnicity alone is not sufficient for explaining Syrian identity, but rather other factors such as class, territoriality, religion and policy concur for understanding the Syrian social mosaic.

This chapter explores different approaches to identity and politicisation of identities in the quest for a suitable one for understanding multifaceted Syrian identities. A conceptualisation of identity, the impact of crisis and conflicts on it, and its degrees of social and political saliency, is a pre-condition for the study of Syrian identity formation in conflict-generated diaspora. The two major approaches for studying the social significance of identity are primordialism/essentialism and constructivism. Constructivism, which considers identity as a product of social forces subjected to continuous reformulations, emerged in the late 1980s as an explicit alternative to the primordialism, which believes in the biological and ethnic basis of identity.

Arguably, the mechanical or primordial type of political solidarity is often exploited by politics and emerges in political crisis. Fixed conceptions of collective identities might reinforce hierarchical relations within and between groups[220] favouring political manipulations of identity. Conversely, the constructivist approach appears appropriate for dealing with fluid, situational and crosscutting Syrian

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[217] http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/images/maps/Syria_Ethnic_Detailed_lg.png
[218] Antoun and Quataert (1991), p. 11.
[219] Van den Berghe (1981), p. 15.
[220] Snyder, G. (2012). "Multivalent recognition: Between fixity and fluidity in identity politics. *The Journal of Politics*, 74 (1), 249-261, p. 249.

diasporic identities. In the process of identity construction, multi-identity and multiple layers of identification can coexist. After taking into account approaches towards identity, the chapter evaluates the role of the state, in particular, the role of minority rule in Syria in driving group identification.

3.1 Approaches to identity: the social construction of primordial attachments

Primordialism versus constructivism

Shils first defined "primordial sentiments" as "ties of blood" and "sacred bonds".[221] Interestingly, Shils does not use the term primordialism to define an approach to ethnic identity; he rather speaks of "primordial feelings or attachments". The theorisation of primordialism is attributed to Geertz, with his classification of the "givens" of social existence related to "ethnic membership". [222] To summarise Geertz's denotations of a given from birth identity, it is "ineffable", has to do with "affection" and is "*ab origine*". [223] Ineffability refers to the impossibility of explaining the motives for the sense of belonging to an ethnic (ethno-religious, very often in the Syrian context) community. Another denotation is "affection", which can be extended to "group solidarity".

Payaslian, dealing with Syrian Armenians, defines primordial identity as "basic group identity", composed of "ancestral ties" a sense of "sameness" shared by the members of an ethnic group.[224] Primordialist views are used by Syrian Armenians to talk about their identity mostly for explaining identity preservation, exclusive membership and ghettoisation.[225] This does not mean that primordialism would suit the understanding of Armenian identity, which is widely recognized as fluid, subjective and based on a political sense of belonging. [226] Through essentialist explanations, in fact, it is difficult to interpret the process that led to the construction of a Syrian identity coexisting with the Armenian one or, in other words, of an

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[221] Shils, E. (1957). "Primordial, personal, sacred and civil ties some particular observations on the relationships of sociological research and theory." *The British Journal of Sociology,* 8 (2), 130-145, p. 142.
[222] Geertz, C. (1975). *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays.* New York: Basic Books, p. 252.
[223] Geertz (1975).
[224] Payaslian (2007), p. 94; Survey results.
[225] Payaslian (2007).
[226] Panossian (2006); Kasbarian …

Armenian way to be Syrian.

The concept of ᶜaṣabiyya, commonly translated as group feeling or group solidarity, by Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) is commonly conceived through essentialist lenses as explanatory of the conception of identity deriving from the tribe or the ethnic group. ᶜAṣabiyya is given by the affiliation to a "tribe". However, the concept seems to be collocated beyond the essentialist approach. As al-Sa'aidah points out, "there are two different types of group feelings" in Ibn Khaldun. The first one is a fixed, innate feeling for the cult of tribe, which led to irrationality and superstition. The second one is the group feeling as extensive and based on shared common interests. Group feeling has different levels of intensity and it can also be "destroyed".[227] Ibn Khaldun conceives it as dynamic, changing according to and perfectly adaptable to the particular circumstance. In the second case, ᶜaṣabiyya has to do with "affection" and "mutual help"[228] amongst the members of the group, which keeps them united. Like ᶜaṣabiyya, group identity is given from birth (*ab origine*), but it may not necessarily be fixed and isolated.

The fluidity of identity is a constituent of the constructivist approach, which sees identity as a social construction. Guzzini and Leander, amongst others, outline the constituencies of identity in the frame of constructivism as "not given" and "not stable", influencing the behaviour of the actors and playing a role in their motivation, after being defined through the interaction with other communities.[229] The debate between primordialism and constructivism is very similar to that between descriptivism and anti-descriptivism, well summarised by Sayyid.[230] While descriptivism considers identity as a developing formation of features, anti-descriptivism sees it as the product of an "initial baptism".[231] As Sayyid implicitly suggests in his attempts to solve the controversy, a form of "re-construction"[232] of the initial baptism, of the given and "primordial" genealogy is involved.

The social dimension of collective identity is a group characteristic in a Durkheimian sense.[233] Given that group solidarity produces "social cohesion",

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[227] Ibn Khaldun, (1967). p. 468.
[228] Ibn Khaldun (1967), p. 273.
[229] Guzzini and Leander (2006), p. 94.
[230] Sayyid (1997).
[231] Sayyid (1997), p. 146.
[232] Sayyid (1997), p. 147.
[233] Klandermans, P. (2014). "Identity politics and politicized identities: Identity processes and the

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Durkheim's theorisation explains the multiple nature of social solidarity: "In effect, what makes the individual more or less strictly attached to his group is not only the greater or lesser multiplicity of the points of attachment, but also the variable intensity of the forces which hold him attached there".[234] Following Durkheim's distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity[235], it is not inappropriate to say that the former would be produced by primordial attachments, and the latter by socially constructed ones. Durkheim shows there can be a multiplicity of points of affection and the two types (mechanical and organic) can coexist in the individual and in the group. Elsewhere in Durkheim's writings[236], he illustrates that complications are likely to occur when multiplicity collapses and only one of type of affiliation prevails in the group.[237]

As constructivists like Hogg and Abrams observe, when collective identity is "salient", the behaviour is associated with "group belongingness".[238] In addition, there are degrees of saliencies, according to the situation.[239] The intensity also depends on insecurity, as can be perceived in the case of Syria, where, in the threat of disappearance, Syrian identities are to be re-established and re-affirmed. Interestingly, social constructivists like Hogg are successful in identifying the positive and negative outcomes of what they call "pre-existing membership".[240] On the one hand, there is the positive potentiality of "creativity" and "challenging" the power of the majority; on the other, the negativity of "dogmatism, stereotyping and naturalization".[241] In this view, the negative effect is explained by the "rigidity" of status.[242] The situational nature of identity is in the interest of a more integrative approach towards constructivism formulated by Allahar. In his view, primordial constituencies of identity can be socially constructed[243] because they are context specific and in a

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dynamics of protest". *Political Psychology,* 35 (1), 1-22, p. 2.

[234] Durkheim, E. (1969). *The division of labor in society.* Glencoe: Free Press, p. 148.

[235] Mechanic solidarity is created by "similarity" or "likeness" between the members, so it has to do with ethnicity. In Durkheim's view, this is typical of traditional societies. Organic solidarity is based on a sort of social contract, in which common social beliefs and interest are shared by the members as in modern societies.

[236] Durkheim (1969).

[237] Durkheim (1969).

[238] Abrams, D. and Hogg, M. (1990). "Social identification, self-categorization and social influence." *European Review of Social Psychology,* 1 (1), 195-228, p. 218.

[239] Abrams and Hogg (1990).

[240] Abrams and Hogg (1990), p. 202.

[241] Abrams and Hogg (1990).

[242] Abrams and Hogg (1990), p. 203.

[243] Allahar, A. (1994). "More than an oxymoron: ethnicity and the social construction of primordial

constant progress of re-invention.[244] Allahar notes that, especially in the case of diaspora communities, primordial identity goes "beyond blood", in the construction of the new community, not necessarily less intense than the old one.[245]

The analysis of Syrian diaspora and their new settlements in Australia and Armenia in two different contexts can offer interesting points of reflection. As Allahar correctly outlines, the "decision to belong" and the "development" of identity depend on security and equality. This thesis adopts the constructivist approach, keeping in mind the importance of *a priori* identities. Following Allahar, a form of primordial constructivism is possible. In fact for Syrians, identity is a matter of birth, which influences the social life of individuals, but this does not mean that it is unchangeable and given once. In Syria, what Guzzini and Leander identify as two separated types of identity – that is, "corporate" (pre-existing and stable) and "social" (dynamic defining process)[246] – are intertwined. Syrians maintain their connection to a predetermined identity, but the latter is shaped by social, political and economic contexts.

Identity in the postmodern world

The "situationalist" or "contextualist" accounts[247] use the post-structuralist approach to explain identity. As one scholar has noted, "identity is invoked to highlight the unstable, multiple, fluctuating, and fragmented nature of the contemporary self".[248] This is evident in the experiences of two post-structuralist thinkers like Jacques Derrida and Amin Ma'alouf, revealing that people can have coexisting layers of identity. When asked which form of identification prevails, even after a profound philosophical reflection, Derrida and Ma'alouf are not able to answer. Their condition of multi-identity does not allow them to choose one. They simply identify themselves as simultaneously French, Algerian (in Derrida's case) or Lebanese (in Ma'alouf's case), and belonging to a religious minority.[249] While their situation is atypical, it is not so exceptional for Syrian and diaspora communities.

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attachment." *Canadian Ethnic Studies,* 26 (3), 18-33.
[244] Allahar (1994).
[245] Allahar (1994).
[246] Allahar (1994), p. 98.
[247] Allahar (1994).
[248] Allahar (1994*),* p. 12.
[249] Derrida is Jewish, Ma'alouf is Melkite Catholic.

As Derrida notes, such a condition is "exceptional and fundamental"[250], at the same time. He is likely to mean that under atypical circumstances the conception of identity is salient and central for the analysis of the events. A possible consequence is that if we want to understand identity we have to refer to exceptional cases, in which *identification* is of paramount importance. Assuming the confusion surrounding the term identity in social and political analysis, Brubaker and Cooper claim the words "identification" and "self-understanding" are active forms to be preferred to the reified "identity".[251] As for the former, it includes relational and categorical modes:

> One may identify oneself (or another person) by position in a relational web (a web of kinship, for example, or of friendship, patron-client ties, or teacher-student relations). On the other hand, one may identify oneself (or another person) by membership in a class of persons sharing some categorical attribute (such as race, ethnicity, language, nationality, citizenship, gender, sexual orientation, etc.).[252]

Relational and categorical forms of identification can coincide when people tend to socialise with members of the same class of persons, to use Brubaker's terms. As for self-understanding, Brubaker and Cooper define "situated subjectivity" as:

> One's sense of who one is, of one's social location, and of how (given the first two) one is prepared to act. As a dispositional term, it belongs to the realm of what Pierre Bourdieu has called *sens pratique*, the practical sense – at once cognitive and emotional – that persons have of themselves and their social world.[253]

The perception of the self in practice goes beyond the generalisations of the identity discourse. As Brubaker and Cooper highlight, this is the case for both the individual and the group self-understanding, where the analytic use of identity fails to recognise the difference between strongly groupist attachments and those that are more open.[254]

In group self-understanding and solidarity, the strength of the groupness feeling is created again by the simultaneity between categorical and relational modes: categorical sameness or commonality work together with relational connectedness amongst the members of the group to produce the feeling of "belonging together".[255] In order to distinguish between "vehemently felt groupness" and "weakly constraining forms of affinity and affiliation", different grades of communality and

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[250] Derrida, J. (1998). *The monolingualism of the other*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, p. 32.
[251] Brubaker and Cooper (2000), p. 15.
[252] Brubaker and Cooper (2000).
[253] Brubaker and Cooper (2000), p. 17.
[254] Brubaker and Cooper (2000), p. 19.
[255] Brubaker and Cooper (2000), p. 20.

connectedness and the varying significance attributed to them by the members of the group have to be kept in mind. This is also so in "multi-layered Syrian national identity", as Phillips suggests.[256]

Social identity theory and Syrian identity

Social Identity Theory (SID) is an appropriate approach, already institutionalised and used in the study of small groups (as Syrian communities are in Armenia and Australia), to connect the individual, psychological with the collective, social identity. Social Identity Theory looks at either the psychological dimension or at the group (social) identity as sources of motivation. Self-categorisation is considered an important corollary, linking the self or the individual with the personification in the group. In this sense, identification is always the product of a social and personal choice of the individual to categorise himself or herself with the values of the group or community. The conception of "me" as making part of a social "us" is the result of the process of self-identification.

Self-categorisation is very often seen as a stereotype-generating process, since in creating "us" it reinforces the dichotomy "us" versus "them", as outlined by Herriot concerning the need to oppose with an "enemy" for the identification.[257] This, in Herriot's view, "accentuates the differences between the groups".[258] According to the principle of meta-contrast, social identity optimally minimises inter-group differences and maximises the extra-group differences.[259] This process is an accentuation of the basic idea of the construction of identity starting from the "other". However, stereotyping is not the only outcome of self-categorisation. It can also have a positive value, in the sense that it reduces the risks of depersonalisation or "anonimie", to use Durkheim's word, the group identity having a strong humanising power.[260]

Terry and Hogg integrate the theory first defined by Tajfel, which sees people evaluating themselves on the basis of groups to which they belong[261] and Turner's self-categorisation. The result is a model of social influence in the groups, when the social identity is salient, as in the case of Syrian groups. Two implications are of

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[256] Phillips (2015), p. 371.
[257] Herriot (2007), p. 32.
[258] Herriot (2007).
[259] Terry and Hogg (1996), p. 779.
[260] Herriot (2007), p. 39.
[261] See also Tajfel (1978).

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extreme interest for this thesis: the conception of group identity as transformable; and the view of social dimension as not separated from the private. As Terry and Hogg observe, "the process of self-categorization not only is responsible for the construction of a contextually salient in-group prototype but also assimilates self to the prototype and thus transforms self".[262] As a consequence, social identity does not only influence the public behaviour, but it is also active in the private sphere.[263] The latter, having to do with the psychological dimension, counts most in influencing motivation.

Oyersman and Destin apply the model of Identity-based Motivation (IBM) defined as:

> The IBM model assumes that the self-concept is multifaceted, including many diverse and not well-integrated identity components with content that is dynamically constructed in context. People interpret situations in ways that are congruent with their currently active identities, prefer identity-congruent actions over identity-incongruent ones, and interpret any difficulties they encounter in light of identity-congruence. When action feels identity congruent, experienced difficulty in engaging in relevant behaviours simply highlights that the behaviour is important and meaningful. Conversely, when action feels identity incongruent, the same difficulty suggests that engaging in these behaviours is pointless and "not for people like me".[264]

Since in the context of the Syrian conflict, the existence itself of the group is at risk, as Social Identity Theory proposes, social identity provides to the needs of self-esteem and reduction of uncertainty.[265] Perceived and real threats reinforce group social identity. One possible practical implication is that the individual seeks material and psychological support firstly from their community, which is trusted most. Social identity derives from the belonging to an ethno-religious group, given from birth. However, the presence of dissimilarities within the group might testify that the primordial attachments are not given once for all or static but as part of social identity, developing as the individual and the group develops.

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[262] Terry and Hogg (1996), p. 780.
[263] Terry and Hogg (1996).
[264] Oyserman, D. and Destin, M. (2010). "Identity-Based Motivation: Implications for intervention". *The Counseling Psychologist,* 38 (7), p. 1002.
[265] Herriot (2007), p. 37.

3.2 Politicisation of identity

Identity saliency in politics

Following the approaches delineated above, fluidity of identity implies different levels of identity saliency in politics. As Gurr and Harff suggest, the revival of group identity depends on three external factors: "(1) the severity of the communal group's disadvantages in relation to other groups; (2) the extent of cultural differences between a communal group and others with which it interacts; (3) the intensity of conflict with other groups and the state".[266] It should not be assumed that a strong group feeling is always associated with violence and a looser one with peaceful coexistence, as in the primordialist account that considers identity as inherently conflictive. Following the instrumentalist line delineated by Obershall[267], it could be argued that political and institutional frames play an important role in identity-related conflicts. In other words, the crisis does not start with identity, but rather it is the frame of the crisis itself and the associated feelings of insecurity and fear that promote manipulation of identity and incite identity-based grievances.[268]

Shared grievances and collective engagement for challenging the power structure that is perceived to cause the grievance can be the force for politicisation of identities.[269] Subordinate group mobilisation can occur in the form of different political movements, both violent and peaceful (at the elector level or with non-violent protests), but it is generally a response to a degree of incompatibility between the interest of the state and that of the group.[270] In particular, the reaction is directed against a differential treatment of the groups in social practice and government policy. In this regard, the group becomes politicised when it collectively suffers from the discriminatory (disadvantaged group), or benefits from the differential treatment (advantaged group).[271]

Agenda-based violent actions that include terrorism, civil war and rebellions – as

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[266] Gurr, T. and Harff, B. (eds.) (1993). *Minorities at risk: A global view of ethnopolitical conflicts.* Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, p. 126.
[267] Oberschall, A. (2000). "The manipulation of ethnicity: From ethnic cooperation to violence and war in Yugoslavia". *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* 23 (6), 982-1001.
[268] Hussein, J. (2016). "Frame analysis of the politics of identity and conflict at territorial frontiers: The case of Jarso-Girhi in Eastern Ethiopia". *African Identities,* 1-21, p. 19.
[269] Klandermans (2014), p. 13.
[270] Brown, D. (1985). "Crisis and ethnicity: Legitimacy in plural societies". *Third World Quarterly,* 7 (4), 988-1008, p. 1008.
[271] Gurr and Harff (1993), p. 6.

currently happening in Syria – are distinguished from event-based violent actions such as rioting.[272] Leach, Brown and Worden claim that the latter is used when the subordinate group reacts to the dominant group's violent methods and repressions, when there is no faith in the political or judicial system.[273] Doornbos presents different cases of mobilisation based on identity: struggle for survival of vulnerable groups, struggle for access to resources and political representation, claim for autonomy and for exclusive rights, mini-nationalisms.[274]

As Leach, Brown and Worden suggest, every type of mobilisation starts with the recognition that the dominant group's hegemony is not legitimate. In particular, a subordinate group compares its status with the dominant group status and identifies a form of disadvantage.[275] For the political movement to take place, the disadvantage has to be perceived as "shared" by the group, "unfair or illegitimate" and "changeable by their political efforts".[276] As Gurr explains, the mobilisation can occur in defence or promotion of the self-defined interests.[277]

Lack of hegemony is common in the case of internal wars,[278] and implies crisis in the authority apparatus, dissolution of the political system, dissociation between political society and civil society, and, ultimately state collapse. Brown describes the impact of crisis in identification as having two major effects: the strengthening of sub-loyalties, including ethnic ones, and the formation of cohesive nationalism against the common external enemy.[279] Despite the common perception of the two as incompatible and mutually exclusive, Brown emphasises their mutual relationship, in the sense that stronger sub-identities can provide a solid basis for national cohesion.[280] Politics of inclusion in post-crisis can represent a prerequisite for dual identity and coexistence of sub-national and national loyalties. While state weakness in crisis allows neo-patrimonial systems of clientelism for political support, inclusiveness in post-conflict has to do with civilian support, closer relationships between citizens and the state, the incorporation of a larger set of stakeholders, and

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[272] Leach, C. W., Brown, L. M. and Worden, R. E. (2008). *Ethnicity and identity politics.* New York: Elsevier Inc.
[273] Leach, Brown and Worden (2008).
[274] Leach, Brown and Worden (2008), p. 58.
[275] Leach, Brown and Worden (2008), p. 63.
[276] Leach, Brown and Worden (2008).
[277] Gurr and Harff (1993), p. 6.
[278] Gurr and Harff (1993), p. 6.
[279] Brown (1985), p. 1002.
[280] Brown (1985).

wider representativeness.[281]

As Paddor notes, Syria presents a situation of "policy dilemmas regarding inclusion and legitimacy".[282] Deciding on representativeness will not be simple, given that National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces represent an alternative government in exile (based in Cairo), and other groups' leaderships are based outside the Syrian borders, such as the Free Syrian Army, which established its headquarters in Turkey in 2012. What will be "inclusive or legitimate in the eyes of the Syrian people remains uncertain".[283]

Since politicisation of identity from below implies the recognition of a disadvantage, its exacerbation is the failure of the state to absorb the demands of marginalised groups.[284] The relationship between the state and the groups involves the formulation of a dual identity, which includes simultaneous identification in "super-ordinate structures" (nation-state or society at large) and "sub-ordinate structures" (the group). The two are commonly perceived as mutually exclusive. However, the two can coexist in theory. As Klandermans claims, the two "are *made* mutually exclusive through identity politics which suppresses subgroup identities in favor of national identity".[285] The suppression of subordinate identity is explained by Brown: "It is clearly relevant to an understanding of politics in ethnically plural states to distinguish between those that adopt depluralisation strategies and those that opt for accommodation or ethnic domination".[286] Depluralisation strategies tend to emphasise the value of national cohesion at the expense of sub-national identities, which are considered subordinate to the national ones. The accommodation strategy is embedded in the perception of sub-national identities as "potentially stronger than ties to the state".[287] Ultimately, ethnic domination is based on the idea of the "siege", where anxieties towards communal conflict make it possible for a dominant group to access and maintain power.[288]

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[281] Podder, S. (2013). "Non-State armed groups and stability: Reconsidering legitimacy and inclusion". *Contemporary Security Policy,* 34 (1), 16-39, p. 19.
[282] Podder (2013)*,* p. 22.
[283] Podder (2013)*.*
[284] Podder (2013)*,* p. 12.
[285] Podder (2013)*,* p. 14.
[286] Brown (1985).
[287] Brown (1985).
[288] Brown (1985).

State-sponsored identity

As Brubaker and Cooper claim, "the modern state is the most important agent of identification".[289] Theories of identity politics focus on the situational, instrumental and nepotistic approach towards politicised identity groups, where identity is an important political instrument of the state. In Van den Berghe's view, the easiest and most direct way is the third one, or to rely on the ethnic group in the form of an extended nepotism towards the members of the group.[290] The state can adopt different ideological and non-ideological strategies to drive its citizens' identification. They include what Foucault would call symbolic and physical forces for monopolisation.[291]

Since the state is a "non-specific and discontinuous reality", and state policy is "theoretically infinite", the state sets limits to its policy.[292] Politics of identity is one of the realms in which the state creates de facto limitations of the government sphere of action or agenda. An instance where the government may set limitations when dealing with ethnic groups or minorities is group autonomy in public sectors such as education. Importantly, when the state decides to auto-limit its intervention in a certain domain, it releases a freedom in that domain. As shown in Chapter 7 where this perspective is applied to Syria, Syrian identity promotes group autonomy in many fields (education is one of them), but still imposes government intervention in those fields.

Brubaker and Cooper classify other actors associated with the formation of identification in civil society including families, firms, schools and other key civil organisations.[293] To drive identification, a "redefinition and restructuring of the relationship between state and civil society", Doornbos notes, is necessary.[294] The state cannot have the monopoly on identification unless it has the monopoly over non-state institutions, bureaucracies and social habits. The state has "the material and symbolic resources to impose the categories, classificatory schemes, and modes of social counting and accounting with which bureaucrats, judges, teachers and doctors

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[289] Brubaker and Cooper (2000), p. 15.
[290] Van den Berghe (1981).
[291] Foucault, M. (2008). *The birth of biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79* edited by Michel Senellart; translated by Graham Burchell. Hampshire (England); New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
[292] Foucault (2008), p. 10.
[293] Brubaker and Cooper (2000), p. 16.
[294] Doornbos (1991), p. 59.

must work and to which non-state actors must refer".[295] Political manipulation of identity, then, occurs at both structural and superstructural level.

In the Gramscian sense, the two are bounded by the "necessary and vital nexus between the structure and superstructure".[296] In Gramsci, the structure is the real basis, the material forces exercised by humans in social and economic production.[297] On this, an institutional, political and ideological superstructure is created. In the realm of politics of identity, while the structure is represented by identity production from above at society level, the superstructure is embodied in the ideological and political apparatus that drives the identification from above at state level. The relationship between structure and superstructure formulated by Gramsci is useful for understanding how identification from below and from above interact.

Away from structural mechanicism, Gramsci refers to "dialectic causation" of superstructures.[298] The symbiotic link of the latter with the structure is clarified by Gramsci in the sense that ideologies without material forces would only be "individual whims".[299] This also means that individuals are not passive recipients of structural and superstructural forces. Applying this to politics of identity, forms of identification exercised from above are in a dialectical nexus with those exercised from below. The results of the dialectic are not necessarily mechanistic, in the sense that the former does not determine the latter or vice versa. The synthesis can be affirmative, antagonist or reformulating of identity formations, according to the degree of mediation.

In Hall's neo-Gramscian understanding, the ideological apparatus is the main actor of mediation, since it "holds together the society and the conflicting elements within it".[300] Eagleton also clarifies that ideology is no longer synonymous for "false consciousness".[301] Ideology is not "false" *per se,* but when it does not have foundations deriving from the structure, it loses the mediating function and acts merely at the surface level. In Gramsci's view, when ideology does not deploy its function of "balancing between the extremes", between "structure" (masses or civil

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[295] Doornbos (1991),, p. 59.
Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith*).* New York: International Publishers, p. 222 (Q4, 15, 437).
[297] Gramsci (1971), p. 820.
[298] Gramsci (1971), p. 822.
[299] Gramsci (1971). "Ghiribizzi individuali" in the original, p. 869.
[300] Davis, H. (2004). *Understanding Stuart Hall.* London: Sage, p. 78.
[301] Eagleton, T. (2007). *Ideology: An introduction.* London, New York, Verso, p. 12.

society) and "superstructure" (hegemony or authority) is a mere instrument of dominance.[302] This also occurs when the institutionalised spheres of the state see the function of ideology as a tool of the dominant group.[303]

Hall clearly explains the implications of dominant superstructures and structures for the analysis of identity (race, in his vocabulary). Identity discourses have a direct material and symbolic effect on the lives of people in society, "bound in their daily lives by their immediate experiences of class and racial structures of dominance".[304] Institutions, at the same time, "regulate the cultures" of society and are "determined by social and political relations operating throughout society".[305] From Hall's perspective, it is evident that the identity of the state and the identity of its citizens are in a mutual relationship. The two might or might not coincide, depending on the legitimacy of the ruling class.

Doornbos explains that it is the political superiority, the conflict between the dominant and the subordinate groups, that causes increased ethnic and cultural differentiation.[306] The functioning of a social group in the state depends on the willingness of "individuals with deviant wishes to give way to the dominant order".[307] As Hall emphasises, it is important to understand that regimes not only function through processes of "identity and similarity", but also through mechanisms of "differentiation and difference",[308] and coercion and consensus in Gramscian terms. In other words, the ruling group may use "differentiated forms of exploitation"[309], including the exploitation of ethnic and national identity. This is not equivalent to saying that the state always intervenes in matters concerning identity, but rather that the state has to act coherently across the government and the societal sphere. It is important to consider that incoherence in the identity of the state depends on the gap between state-sponsored identity and social identity.

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[302] Gramsci (1971), p. 134.
[303] Gramsci (1971), p. 83.
[304] Hall, S. (1986). "Gramsci's relevance for the study of race and ethnicity." *Journal of Communication Inquiry,* 10(2), 5-27. p. 23.
[305] Davis (2004), p. 167.
[306] Doornbos (1991), p.63.
[307] Doornbos (1991).
[308] Hall (1986), p. 24.
[309] Hall (1986).

3.3 Politicisation of identity in Syria

Politicisation of identity in Syrian history

This thesis follows Gramsci's conception of history applied to the study of identity. Contrary to the primordial approach that sees identity as fixed in time, identity is addressed as a historical construct. Any historical product, according to Gramsci, is defined in terms of "objectivity" as the result of human action.[310] The latter is "predictable only to the extent that they are heteronomous, that is to say, to the extent that they are constrained through mechanisms of coercion and propaganda".[311] For identity to be "historically objective"[312] in the Gramscian sense, it needs to be intended as heteronomous, subjected to the coercion of the political and social historical contexts. Identity, however conceived as referring to the unique character of an individual, of a group or of a nation, is shaped through mechanisms of repetitions in which history plays an important role.[313]

Governments adopt different strategies to drive identitarian awareness in religious and ethnic groups. Generally speaking, there are two opposite political programs, as suggested by Doornbos: to emphasise identity or to de-emphasise it.[314] They can be used interchangeably, simultaneously or inconsistently. In Syrian history, there are instances of both programs, which, to use Altug's words, are "the politics of difference" and the "politics of obscuring difference".[315] The distinction between the two strategies might appear as an overgeneralisation, but it is not. The labels are composed of different constituencies, according to the historical and geopolitical context, and Posner claims that: "In each case, the strategic decisions made by political actors have been cast as a choice between actively drawing upon ethnic identity or actively hiding from it".[316]

In the first category, there is the strategy of *divide et impera* or divide and rule. In broad terms, it includes the political or geographical division of the country according

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[310] Gramsci (1971), p. 1415.
[311] Kirtchik, O., Boldyrev, I. and Omodeo, P. D. (2016). "After Nikolai Bukharin." *History of the Human Sciences,* 29 (4-5), 13-34, p. 22.
[312] Doornbos (1991), p. 63.
[313] Breuilly, J. (ed.) (2013). *The Oxford handbook of the history of nationalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
[314] Doornbos (1991), p.63.
[315] Altug (2011).
[316] Posner, D. (2005). *Institutions and ethnic politics in Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 115.

to ethnic divisions. Brown effectively explains it as "leaders equate political dissent with communal disunity".[317] Walzer outlines its general principles, as it was in the Ottoman period and in the age of empires: "to maintain the different groups in their difference, allowing them considerable autonomy in exchange for their acceptance of imperial hegemony".[318] In his view, autonomy has different forms (regional or functional, different communal activities) but has one singular effect: "It gives legal standing to the various groups and so requires individuals to identify themselves with one or another of the groups and submit to its laws – most particularly in matters of family life, marriage, divorce, inheritance and so on, also often in matters of education".[319] Those areas of autonomy mostly refer to the sphere of civil society.

The Ottoman millet system can be considered the first formal political organisation of religious communities in Syria. Barkey and Garvilis identify the millet as a non-territorial *divide et impera* politics of difference to manage the divisiveness of the population.[320] Ethnic diversity, diverse territorial and geographic origins characterised the basic millets. Under the same religious umbrella represented by the Greek Orthodox Church, for example, the Greek millet was composed of different ethnicities such as Greeks, Albanians, Bulgarians, Serbians, Moldavians, Ruthenians, Syrians, Arabs and Melkites or across the empire.[321] The Jews were also "geographically dispersed"[322] in the Ottoman Empire and organised in small communities with religious leaders with each community. The Armenian millet also witnessed the presence of different Patriarchs, claiming leadership of all Armenian communities, including those living outside the territory of the Ottoman Empire.[323]

The religious label and leadership worked to maintain "balance and order"[324] within the millets and the empire, but the system was internally fractured and far more complicated than often depicted. As Abraham Marcus points out, the system led to "institutionalized inequalities" with privileges and tax exemptions and reinforced

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[317] Brown (1985), p. 989.
[318] Weiner, E. (1998). *The handbook of interethnic coexistence*. New York: Continuum.
[319] Weiner (1998), p. 24.
[320] Barkey, K. and Gavrilis, G. (2016). "The Ottoman millet system: Non-territorial autonomy and its contemporary legacy". *Ethnopolitics,* 15 (1), 24-42, p. 25.
[321] Barkey and Gavrilis (2016).
[322] Barkey and Gavrilis (2016).
[323] Barkey and Gavrilis (2016).
[324] Barkey and Gavrilis (2016).

social prejudices and labels.[325] Amongst inequalities, there is the disregard of Muslim sub-communities that did not fit in the greater Muslim category. Farouk-Alli claims that Alawis, for example, were at best tolerated and at worse victims of discrimination for most of the Ottoman rule.[326] The legacies of the millet system included inequality and discrimination, which influences understanding of the problematic of the Syrian mosaic in more recent times.

Later on, from 1920, French colonial rule of Syria also developed a system of *divide et impera* politics of difference. In moving from the Ottoman Empire to the Mandate (1920–1946) in dealing with religious communities, the French power maintained the organisation of Ottoman millets (religious communities), but it was "extended" and "concretized".[327] The political autonomy of religious communities was guaranteed by the Personal Status Law[328], which was extended because it also included Muslim heterodox communities such as Alawis and Druzes.[329] The division of Syria into autonomous districts can be framed under the general label of colonial divide and rule politics. As Furedi points out, colonial powers used the ethnic or religious card for the management of colonial territories and colonial administration was "consciously organised to reinforce regional and ethnic separateness" and "carefully cultivated communal allies".[330] The division occurred in various strata of societal organisation, from the maintenance of a divided labour force according to ethnic basis to the creation of an indigenous class of rulers originally from indigenous aristocracy.[331]

In the French rule of Syria, the preference for Christians was useful for legitimating the French rule as defender of Christians in Levant.[332] Altug describes the realisation of an advanced "continuity" with the Ottoman system by the French.[333] In her view, the French mandate empowered ethno-religious differences as "protector of Christians", alongside the rural versus urban and inter-elite rivalries. The *divide et*

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[325] Barkey and Gavrilis (2016), p. 38.
[326] Farouk-Alli, A. (2014). "Sectarianism in Alawi Syria: Exploring the paradoxes of politics and religion". *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs,* 34 (3), 207-226, p. 211.
[327] Antoun and Quataert (1991), p. 71.
[328] Art. 6 of the Mandate Charter.
[329] During the Ottoman period these communities were not formally recognised as religious sects, but considered as making part of the mainstream Islam.
[330] Furedi, F. (1990). "Britain's colonial wars: Playing the ethnic card". *The Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics,* 28 (1), 70-89, p. 78.
[331] Furedi (1990)*,* p. 79.
[332] White (2007)*,* p. 73.
[333] Altug (2011)*.*

impera or "divide and rule" French strategy had the political intent of appeasing nationalist feelings fostering divisions amongst religious groups.[334]

Farouk-Alli compellingly describes the effects of the French politics of identity:

> The Alawi community still remained internally divided at the onset of the French occupation. […] The Alawis historical background as a compact religious minority and their internal divisions were exploited by the French, who nurtured the already existing kernel of separatism as a way to stifle the national independence movement that was closely associated with and controlled by Sunni Islamism.[335]

Farouk-Alli's comments further clarify the French intent of minimising in-group differences and maximising out-group ones for the sake of power. In fact, rather than having an actual correspondence in Syrian society, the label was a political instrument of the French rule, which, instead of being interested in the implementation of the Syrian state[336], manipulated groups to pursue their main target of colonial presence in the region.[337]

Ethnic and class cleavages in the Syrian minority rule

In the modern period, with the emergence of the political parties as the main political actors, the strategy of *divide et impera* is replaced by political strategies that deploy group identity very often used in the dialectics between dominant and subordinate groups. Leach, Brown and Worden explain that the dominant group explicitly or implicitly adopts the ethnic card.[338] The explicit use refers to dominant political groups that have to consolidate their hegemonic position. In the terms used by them, "Given their advantaged political position, dominant groups tend to engage in ethnic identity politics as a means to secure or consolidate power".[339] When dominant groups exercise an insecure dominance, ethnicity or group identity can be incited and manipulated.[340]

The ethnic and the class dimension go hand in hand to understand the

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[334] Altug (2011), p. 79.
[335] Farouk-Alli (2014), p. 214.
[336] Zisser, E. (2013). "Can Assad's Syria survive revolution? The struggle for Syria could take a long time to unfold." *Middle East quarterly,* 20(2), pp. 65-72. p. 73.
[337] Farouk-Alli (2014), p. 214.
[338] Leach, Brown and Worden (2008), p. 63.
[339] Leach, Brown and Worden (2008).
[340] Leach, Brown and Worden (2008), p. 76. The scholars mention the case of Jordan, composed roughly of half Jordanian and half Palestinian population (without considering other nationalities with a refugee status), in which the hegemonic position of the former is guaranteed by the Jordanian reign. In periods of tension between Palestinians and Jordanians, the king launched the "Jordan First" campaign to consolidate Jordanian hegemony and to incite national interest.

politicisation of Syrian identity in more recent times. The socio-political circumstances of Alawi emergence as the dominant group in the rise of the Ba'ath Party (1947) are linked to the reformation of Syrian classes, as notably explained by Hinnebusch. Ethnicity and class are the two major modes of collective organisation in complex societies, equally important in Syria. The former is based on common kinship and the latter on common interest, as Van den Berghe explains.[341]

Ethnic solidarity is more fixed than the latter, because it has to do with a common ancestral lineage. Class solidarity is more fluid and likely to change according to the socio-political circumstances, because it is a form of "alliance of convenience" on the basis of opportunism, to use Van den Berghe's terms.[342] With a few exceptions in which the correlation of ethnicity and class is zero or perfect[343], in ethnically and religiously diverse societies like Syria the two are intertwined in many intricate ways, varying from case to case and from time to time. Both class and group ethnicity are so intricate internally and in their interplay, synchronically and diachronically, that a definition of them and a distinction between them is almost impossible.[344]

Syria is no exception in the difficulty of determining the relations between the ethnic and the class factor. It is important, then, to understand the ways the two can possibly interact. Van den Berghe outlines some general principles on the relationship between class and ethnicity in complex societies:

1. The two can be "antithetical".[345] This means that, rather than actually antithetical, they seem to be inversely proportional: when one of them is salient and prevails in social organizations, the other loses significance.[346] In other words, if ethnicity is marked, it will take precedence over class and vice versa (in Van den Berghe's view, the former is more likely to occur).[347]

2. The two can be complementary: when both ethnic and class cleavages are salient, ethnic mobilisation tends to coincide with class disadvantage.[348]

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[341] Van den Berghe (1981), p. 242.
[342] Van den Berghe (1981), p. 244.
[343] Van den Berghe refers to the case of Switzerland for the correlation equivalent to zero and to the Peruvian-type for the correlation one to one.
[344] Gramsci, for one, despite the weight of the concept of class in Marxism, did not explicitly define class, but he rather preferred to use the term in an adjectival form.
[345] Gramsci (1971).
[346] Gramsci (1971), p. 245.
[347] Gramsci (1971), p. 246.
[348] Adapted from Gramsci (1971), p. 245.

This is the case when the ethnic group switches from the right of autonomy and self-determination to the demand for an equal access to resources.[349] The ethnic equalisation can either cause a not radical alteration of the class structure or conflictive outcomes.

3. Mutual repercussions: "broadly, where class groups are rigid and class mobility is difficult, classes tend to acquire properties of ethnicities Conversely, when ethic boundaries are fluid and permeable, ethnicities tend to acquire the properties of classes".[350]

In cases in which the relation between ethnicity and class is linear and the two are perfectly coincident, scholars talk about "ethno-classes"[351] and the cultural division of labour.[352]

Discussing the definition of the Alawite community as a "sect-class", Rosiny highlights that the urban versus rural dichotomy is very often parallel to sectarian affiliations in Syrian society.[353] In Rosiny's opinion, the urbanisation process brought rural communities into contact with their correlative urban ones by producing two different results: competition between established urban and peasant newcomers, but also "preserved community social cohesion".[354] However, the concurrence between sectarian and class ties in Syria is not demonstrated.

The most representative scenario of the three is the second one: ethnic and class cleavages coexist in Syrian groups. The third scenario is also possible. According to it, since the groups in Syria have fluid and permeable borders, they are likely to acquire properties of classes. In his report on Syria's upper class, Perthes notes that "the old bourgeoisie is generally socially conservative and religious"[355], but he does not detail religious attachments. As Sadowski points out, "the urban cliques were largely Sunni Muslim with an occasional number from the Christian communities, so that heterodox Muslims (Druze, Alawis, Ismailis) gravitated toward the cabals".[356] The subordinate position of heterodox Muslim groups pushed them to ethnic mobilisation for a more

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[349] Gramsci (1971).
[350] Gramsci (1971).
[351] See also Gordon (1964).
[352] See also Hetcher (1978).
[353] Rosiny, S. (2013). "Power sharing in Syria: Lessons from Lebanon's Taif experience". *Middle East Policy*, 20 (3), 43.
[354] Rosiny (2013).
[355] Perthes, V. (1991). "A look at Syria's upper class: The Bourgeoisie and the Ba'th." *Middle East Report*, 21, 31-37.
[356] Sadowski, M. Y. (1984). *Political Power and Economic Organization in Syria: the Course of State Intervention*, 1946-1958. PhD dissertation. His emphasis.

equal access to resources.

However, statistical analysis on the class-religion link in Syria is not available. In a study conducted by Hanf questioning the coincidence of class and community in Lebanon, the result is a "considerable stratification within each community" and the class structure is not "community specific". [357] Similar reliable results on the class/community composition in Syria are not given. On this issue, much is left to theoretical speculation and to empirical work. What is important is that class and identity functioned for the politicisation of the Alawi group and its predominant role in the Ba'ath Party.

In particular, the party responded to the emergence of a more and more educated peasantry, which had social and political affinity with Syrian middle class. To quote directly from Hinnebusch: "The Ba'athist Party became the main instrument through which the middle class, peasant coalition was shaped. Its nationalist-populist/statist ideology best expressed the common interests of the two classes". [358] In those circumstances, the so-called compact minorities, especially Alawis and Druzes, became increasingly politicised as part of what Hinnebusch calls the rural intelligentsia that gained early access to education.[359] In addition, an important event was the Ba'athisation of the army[360], with a change in its composition from Sunni upper-middle and middle-class officers to officers with rural and often minority origins.[361] The latter took advantage of the progressive disinterest of the former in the army.[362]

With the Ba'ath Party, it seemed like the religious differences were surpassed by political objectives described by both claims of pan-Arabism and the class-reform claim of socialism. In fact, the first Alawis who joined the party were deviant from the dominant Alawi position, in particular exiles from the Sanjak of Alexandretta for opposing French policy.[363] Syrian President Hafiz al-Assad belonged to a "poor Alawi family", but he was able to assume a predominant position in the Alawi community

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[357] Esman, M. J. and Rabinovich, I. (1988). *Ethnicity, pluralism, and the State in the Middle East.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
[358] Hinnebusch (1991), p. 32.
[359] Hinnebusch (1991), p. 31.
[360] For a detailed composition of the Syrian army see van Dam (1986), pp. 51-71.
[361] Hinnebusch (1991), p. 35.
[362] Haklai, O. (2000). "A minority rule over a hostile majority: The case of Syria." *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics,* 6 (3), 19-50.
[363] Gelvin (1994), p. 1398.

because of the power gained at the national level.[364] As Hinnebusch notes, "the Alawi community was increasingly incorporated into the state, a recruitment that had a double sectarian and class dimension".[365] In particular, minorities like the Alawi played an important role in the social mobilisation and transformation because they felt "alienated on both sectarian and class grounds".[366] Politicisation of identity started with the recognition of racial discrimination and economic disadvantage.

Applying this to Syria, which has been defined as a classical example of "minority rule",[367] Oded Haklai argues that the persecution which groups like the Alawi were subjected to in the past forced them to a separate territory (Latakyia, in the case of Alawis) which was the basis for their political mobilisation.[368] Haklai provides three conditions for the minority rule in Syria:

1. Self-awareness includes a common historical memory, in the case of Alawi, the past fate of persecutions, and the perception of being treated unequally.[369] The resulting paradigm is that less security and greater inequalities lead to more isolation.[370]
2. There must be favorable conditions for seeking political power. In Haklai's view, the conditions for the Alawi group were created by the colonial rule, which ensured the power of ethnic minorities.[371]
3. Lastly, the authoritarian character of the government.[372]

As a consequence, applying theories on politicisation of identities to the Syrian case, the minority rule is the effect of the recognition of disadvantages suffered by the group.

The grievance around identity generated by discrimination served as a source for the political mobilisation of the group under more favorable circumstances. Legitimacy is a key factor for the implementation of the minority rule, which can create new subordination of groups and the basis for new identity grievances. As described by Posner, ethnic lines in political parties can be useful to gain support from

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[364] Van Dam (1986), p. 22.
[365] Hinnebusch (1991), p. 35.
[366] Hinnebusch (1991), p. 32.
[367] Haklai (2000).
[368] Haklai (2000), p. 23.
[369] Haklai (2000), p. 24.
[370] Haklai (2000).
[371] Haklai (2000), p. 25.
[372] Haklai (2000), p. 26.

and to mobilise both the members of the belonging group and members of other groups against a common rival group to restrict its power base.[373]

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter connected theories on identity and theories of politicisation of identity to define a model that accommodates the complexity of Syrian identity. Ultimately, combining theories on identity with those of politics of identity, the politicisation of ethnic and religious identities is possible in periods of instability, insecurity and economic inequality. Primordial attachments become salient in those times, when the mobilisation around group feeling makes pressure for political change. Contrary to the primordialist account, such attachments are not fixed, but rather their social and political significance changes according to the socio-political circumstances.

This particularly suits Syria, a religiously and ethnically diverse state in which the governing class is drawn from a minority group. In particular, it can be derived that identity saliency in politics is not endemic and occurs when there is a degree of incompatibility between the measures of the state to drive the identity of its people and the interests of the groups. The recognition of different interests may lead group identity to political mobilisation.

The constructivist approach, with its branch of the social construction of primordial identity, appears consistent with both the political use of identity at the state level and identity formation at civil society level. The identity of the state and that of the people living in the state share a common root, but both are not fixed and given once for all. The common root of the nation may or may not correspond to that of its people.

More explicative than the word "identity" *per se* in such connection is the term identification, conveying both the in-progress nature of identity as a process rather than a result, and the role of the state in shaping the identity of its population. Syria is an instance of inter-ethnic and inter-religious coexistence guaranteed from above by the state. Following the theories above, when the state collapses, grievance amongst groups formed around ethnicity and/or religion occur along with their politicisation as political parties or other forms of political grouping. In modern Syrian history, there are examples of the coincidence between state-collapse and religious violence, as it is

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[373] Posner (2005), p.115.

clear in chapter 6.

Chapter 4. The new Syrian diaspora in Armenia and Australia

4.1 Introduction

The Syrian refugee crisis is one of the worst cases of population displacement in recent history, with "13.5 million Syrians requiring humanitarian assistance, of which more than 6 million are internally displaced within Syria, and around 5 million are refugees outside of Syria".[374] The violent and long-lasting internal armed conflict that hit Syria in 2011 has caused the largest emigration in its history. This chapter argues that the Syrian conflict has produced a conflict-related diaspora for Syrian people outside Syria. This is justified by the vastness of the migratory movement, the length of the conflict and the reconstruction of a Syrian way of life in exile. Traditional elements of diaspora, such as attachment to the homeland, displacement, return and political mobilisation, are at stake. This chapter is structured around these issues.

The category of diaspora, precisely the sub-category of enforced conflict-generated diaspora, is particularly useful for understanding the last Syrian migratory experience. Only time will tell whether or not Syrian refugees will become diasporans in the host countries, or if they will consider the option of returning to Syria. Time will also tell whether they will assimilate in the host culture or maintain a cultural distinctiveness. In any case, the current diasporic condition has a powerful impact on Syrian identity, which is one of the primary interests of this thesis. The refugee crisis fosters the establishment of the Syrian diaspora and gives it a new political dimension.

More recent approaches towards diaspora, particularly the use of "itinerant perspectives", have proved beneficial for the analysis of historically unfinished phenomena. A framework on diaspora and its practical implications, along with a retrospective of previous activism by Syrian emigrants, is particularly useful. This chapter relies on primary and secondary sources to show that the traditional elements of diaspora are at stake in Syrian communities in exile. This also provides a general background for the next three chapters where the effects and the condition of diaspora produce well-defined identitarian narratives.

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[374] UNHCR. http://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html, (accessed 25 November 2016).

4.2 Diaspora, displacement and Syrian diasporan communities in Armenia and Australia

Diaspora and conflict-generated diasporas

To begin with, it is important to focus on the effects of diaspora on identity in general terms. Diasporic identification includes "a type of retrospective utopian vision"[375], an "imagined homeland" and "collective memories", where the past informs the present and enlightens the future.[376] Diaspora has to do with the maintenance of a relation, whether imagined or real, with the homeland, which is always accompanied by displacement and a "sense of loss, a longing to return or an acceptance of the impossibility of return".[377] The diasporic experience is by definition linked with dispersal from a centre.[378]

A migratory movement is diasporic when it has four simultaneous characteristics. Following Safran's and Cohen's[379] combined factors for definition of diaspora, these are: the persistence of collective sentimental attachment to the homeland; displacement that makes diasporans perceive the hostland as a temporary solution; transnational mobilisation and involvement in the homeland; and the expressed willingness of eventual return to the homeland.

Forced and unforced migrations led by wars, diplomacy, work trade, persecution, education and curiosity transformed the geography of the Middle East as a space accepting and generating diasporic movements at the same time.[380] Recently, the phenomenon of the so-called "Diaspora Spring" has been associated with the migrations resulting from the Arab uprising.[381] To quote directly from Khater:

> These peregrinations weave connections within and outside the Middle East, creating an experience of simultaneity of the near and far for those residing in this interconnected world by constituting transnational and transregional spaces, without

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[375] Tsolidis, G. (ed.) (2014). *Migration, diaspora and identity: Cross-national experiences*. New York: Springer.

[376] Tsolidis (2014), p. 8.

[377] Tsolidis (2014), p. 214.

[378] Tsolidis (2014), p. 5.

[379] Tsolidis (2014), p. 8.; Safran, W. (2005). "The Jewish diaspora in a comparative and theoretical perspective". *Israel Studies,* 10 (1), 36-60; Safran, W. (1991). "Diasporas in modern societies: Myths of homeland and return". *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies,* 1 (1), 83-99.

[380] Khater, A. (2005). "Becoming 'Syrian' in America: A global geography of ethnicity and nation". *Diaspora,* 14 (2-3), 299-332.

[381] Khan, S. (2012). "The Arab diaspora finds its voice." *The Globe and Mail*, June 11. http://www. theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/the-arab-diaspora-finds-its-voice/article4243545/ accessed 17 December 2016.

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dissolving or marginalizing the here or there.[382]

The simultaneity of the near and the far, of the here and there, does not mean that there is a perfect replication of the Middle East in the host countries. Likewise, the reconstructed Syrian identity cannot be a perfect reflection of Syrian identity.

As Gorman and Kasbarian note, migratory movements and displacements in the Middle Eastare generated by conflicts when enforced or by the forces of repressive politics and global capitalism when voluntary.[383] Given that not all migrations generate diaspora, the exclusivity of the diasporic experience in the case of Syrian immigrant communities is to be identified in the intergenerational relationship between old and new migrants, and between them and the Syrian homeland. Before 2011, emigrations from Syria were voluntary and occurred in periods of instability or restrictive community politics. For example, after independence in 1946, interventionist practices from the state[384] took place in a period of instability, insecurity and limitations on group autonomy that led minority groups to emigrate from Syria, as explained by Altug, Mufti and Mouawad.[385]

In the same years (mid to late 1940s), the so-called "Great Repatriation" of Armenian diasporans to the Soviet Republic of Armenia, which started in late 1945 and lasted for four years, took place.[386] The period was characterised by unemployment, extreme poverty in the Armenian quarters, and exclusion of minorities from government and public service.[387] Education also played a role, with community schools deprived of state funds.[388] Another mass emigration occurred during the years of the United Arab Republic (UAR), when minorities saw restrictions and state control on associations, non-Arab schools, languages and newspapers with disfavour and decided to leave Syria.[389] After these years, also called the "turbulent 50s"[390], under

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[382] Khater (2005), p. 300.
[383] Gorman, A. and Kasbarian, S. (ed.) (2015). *Diasporas of the modern Middle East: Contextualising community.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
[384] Zolyan (2015).
[385] Altug (2011)*.*, p.83; Mouawad, R. J. (2001). "Syria and Iraq--Repression." *Middle East Quarterly,* 8 (1), 51; Bahry, L. (1997). "Sovereign creations: Pan-Arabism and political order in Syria and Iraq." *Middle East Policy,* 5 (3), 203-205.
[386] For details on the repatriation see Laycock, J. (2016), "Survivor or Soviet stories? Repatriate narratives in Armenian histories, memories and identities." *History and Memory: Studies in Representation of the Past,* 28 (2), 123-154.
[387] Yousefian, S. (2011). *The Postwar repatriation movement of Armenians to Soviet Armenia, 1945–1948*. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, Los Angeles: University of California, p. 85.
[388] Yousefian (2011).
[389] Another emigration of Armenians from Syria not to Armenia, but mainly to the United States and Australia, occurred during what Migliorino calls the turbulent 1950s and 1960s during the United Arab

the rule of al-Assad, the reasons for leaving Syria included family matters, economic or study opportunities and escaping military service.[391]

After the disillusion of the "Great Repatriation" to the mythicised homeland of Soviet Armenia that ended in 1949, returnees opted for reverse homecoming to their countries of origin, including Syria.[392] Between the late 1960s and 2011, repatriation did not appeal to Syrian Armenians. Kasbarian notes that: "A very small number of diasporans have actually taken up the option of 'return' in the sense of relocating to Armenia".[393] In the new Syrian diaspora caused by the impossibility of living in war-torn Syria, elements of conflict-generated diasporas are at stake. When dealing with conflict-related diasporas, there are many differences (between diasporans who did not witness the violence of the war in person and those who did, for example) and risks to be considered associated with indirect studies like the present one. How does Syrian diasporic identity differ from Syrian identity? Studies on Syrians in other countries contain general implications on being Syrian outside Syria.

As Koinova points out, this kind of diaspora is more likely to experience displacement, attachment to the territory of origin, and the recurrence of the myth of return.[394] For Syrian refugees, the conflict generates a threat of Syria's disappearance, which is a complicating element for the maintenance of double attachments in diasporic identification. The formation of a new diasporic community requires a reconstruction of the motherland, lost in the conflict in this case.

As Shain notes, in peacetime diasporans are able to bridge the host culture and the home culture, the loyalty to the real or symbolic homeland and the hostland; whereas the negotiation might become a more problematic and stigmatising factor in conflict-related phenomena.[395] This also means that the conflict makes the saliency of single loyalties emerge. For diasporans, at times there is the need to sacrifice one of

Republic characterised by restrictions of group autonomy under pan-Arab policies. On this see Altug (2011), p. 83, Kienle, E. (1995). "Arab unity schemes revisited: Interest, identity, and policy in Syria and Egypt". *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 27 (1), 53-71, Hovannisian, R. G. (1974). "The ebb and flow of the Armenian minority in the Arab Middle East." *Middle East Journal,* 28 (1), 19-32, p. 26.
[390] Migliorino (2012), p. 18.
[391] Mouawad (2001).
[392] Laycock (2016), p. 125.
[393] Kasbarian, S. (2015). "The Myth and Reality of 'Return': Diaspora in the 'Homeland'." *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 18 (3), 358-81, p. 358.
[394] Koinova, M. (2011). "Can conflict-generated diasporas be moderate actors during episodes of contested sovereignty? Lebanese and Albanian diasporas compared." *Review of International Studies,* 37 (1), 437-462, p. 438.
[395] Shain, Y. (2002). "Jewish kinship at a crossroads: Lessons for homelands and diasporas." *Political Science Quarterly,* 117 (2), 279-309, p. 280.

the two loyalties (to the homeland and to the hostland) for the sake of "identity sustenance". [396] Conflicts and security dilemmas impact on diaspora-homeland relations, with possibilities of new affirmation, intensification or dispersion of diasporic kinships.

As Khater claims, "experiences in the *mahjar* (land of immigration) involve social and cultural contacts and dislocations necessitating a self-conscious examination of their individual and collective identities". [397] The experience of dissociation with the homeland necessarily leads to a self-reflection on the self, the group and the national identity. This has two possible implications in the case of forced immigration due to civil wars: a "new identity" that forgets the past events and rivalries[398] in the long term or a reformulation of the past identity that is influenced by the tragic events of the war. In all the circumstances of displacement, the homeland and the hostland are the spaces that bear specific meanings rather than mere territorial characteristics. In particular, "presence", "settlement" and "security" are attributed to "home" or "nation".[399] "Absence", "transience" and "threat" are, instead, the features of places of exile and diaspora. These may generate a longing for home and intensify a sense of collective identity "for a common spatial origin".[400]

A fluctuating homeland: Syrian Armenians in Armenia

Typical diasporas include deterritorialised diaspora, where the homeland is lost for geopolitical reasons.[401] The view of the homeland as a place that is not fixed in space and time is particularly important for understanding the categories of diaspora and conflict-related diaspora used in this thesis for framing the formation of Syrian diasporan communities in Armenia and Australia. In their different experiences, place of origin, homeland and place of birth do not always correspond to the same space and may acquire a different significance as the relationship with the homeland and hostland changes.

The Armenian diaspora is an example of diasporic deterritoriality. The "practical homeland", the Republic of Armenia, does not correspond to diasporan Armenians'

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[396] Shain (2002).
[397] Khater (2005), p. 304.
[398] Khater (2005), p. 304.
[399] Cohen, R. (2008). *Global Diasporas: An introduction.* London: Taylor & Francis Group.
[400] Cohen (2008), p. 58.
[401] Cohen (2008), p. 7.

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place of origin in the territories of ancient Anatolia (currently in Turkey) from where Armenians were deported during the Genocide (1915). The territory of the present-day Republic of Armenia is the result of the dissolutions of two great empires: the Ottoman and the Tsarist empires. As Hovannisian puts it, "the historic Armenia plateau was divided unevenly between the Ottoman and the Russian empires".[402] The First Republic of Armenia (1918–1920) was created after the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. In 1918 the First Republic of Armenia, undermined by the disaggregation of the Russian armies on every front, including the Turkish Armenian one, and by Lenin's withdrawal from Turkish Armenian lands, lost any chance for the annexation of the ancestral territory.[403]

To use Hovannisian's words, "as pitiful as a state as was the Republic of Armenia in May, 1918, its very existence was, nevertheless, an amazing accomplishment".[404] In the following years, the newborn Republic saw little territorial concessions, with the Ottoman withdrawal from the Caucasus, the annexation of Kars in 1919 and minor expansion in the borders contended with the neighbouring countries of Georgia and Azerbaijan.[405] The question of the Armenian nation and its border was a major theme at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, but remained unfinished business.[406]

The creation of the Armenian nation-state was the result of a series of territorial losses that left Eastern Anatolia and the sacred Ararat outside. Geopolitical reasons also play a role in shaping the map of Syria after the conflict, something that makes the Syrian Armenian diaspora doubly deterritorialised. In Syrian Armenian experience, the place of birth, Syria, is disintegrated because of the conflict; the place of origin, Anatolia, is lost after the Genocide; and the concrete homeland, present-day Armenia, is not where it should be.[407]

Distance from a territorially undefined place in most cases makes the homeland a fluctuating notion. Imagined homelands or places of origin do not only produce diaspora, but they are also products of diaspora, effects of multiple forms of displacement.[408] Understood this way, as mutually productive, diaspora and homeland

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[402] Hovannisian, R. G. (1971). *The Republic of Armenia.* Berkeley: University of California Press.
[403] Hovannisian (1971).
[404] Hovannisian (1971), p. 38.
[405] Hovannisian (1971).
[406] Hovannisian (1971), p. 251.
[407] Imranli-Lowe, K. (2015). "Reconstruction of the 'Armenian Homeland' notion." *Middle Eastern Studies,* 51 (4), 540-562, p. 541.
[408] Axel, B. K. (1996). "Time and threat: Questioning the production of the diaspora as an object of study." *History and Anthropology,* 9 (4), 415-43, p. 416.

are not linear and stable constituents. Displacement, territory and martyrdom are all products of diasporic moments.[409] When dealing with volatile diasporic experiences, the analysis has to go beyond the prevailing state narratives of essentialist politics that make advantage of primordial attachments. There is also the need to consider diasporic narratives that constitute a meaningful history from below, which is one of the aims of the thesis.

The repatriation of Armenians from Syria to Armenia, a reduced but significant portion of the current Syrian refugee crisis, is an exemplar for the fluctuating nature of the homeland. The problematic return to the ancestral homeland ethnically speaking represents a significant instance of diaspora of diaspora. The latter is defined as a return to the ancestral homeland, different from the imagined one, and as a new form of migration experience producing renewed diasporic characteristics.[410] The formation of a new Syrian Armenian community in Armenia requires a negotiation between the birthplace of Syria, lost in the conflict, and an unfamiliar homeland in Armenia. This kind of diaspora is more likely to experience displacement, attachment to the territory of origin, and the recurrence of the myth of return.[411] The following paragraphs focus on displacement, while attachment and return narratives are discussed later in the chapter.

Narratives of displacement

Displacement has to do with both material and immaterial aspects that influence Syrian Armenian identity and lead to a renegotiation of the Armenian homeland. Syrian Armenians who fled war-torn Syria encountered a welcoming country[412] in Armenia as far as administrative matters are concerned, with visa, passport and permanent residency or citizenship granted to them. The ethnic solidarity that made the repatriation possible turned out to be disadvantageous for Syrian Armenians who could not claim legal refugee status on their arrival in Armenia. This led to "an atypical situation where they are not *de jure* refugees but they are indeed *de facto*

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[409] Axel (1996).

[410] Erciyes, J. C. C. (2008). "Diaspora of diaspora: Adyge-Abkhaz returnees in the ancestral homeland." *Diaspora,* 17 (3), 340-61, p. 341.

[411] Koinova, M. (2011). "Can conflict-generated diasporas be moderate actors during episodes of contested sovereignty? Lebanese and Albanian diasporas compared." *Review of International Studies,* 37 (1), 437-462, p. 438.

[412] Calin-Stefan, G. (2014). "The integration of Syrian-Armenians in the Republic of Armenia: A case study." *Romanian Journal of Political Science,* 14 (2), 57-72, p. 61.

ones". [413] While they had the concession of travel documents and an Armenian passport specially created for them, they had the same material needs as other Syrian refugees (a house, food, clothes for the long Armenian winter) and were distressed because they left everything behind in Syria and faced a long journey across unsafe borders.

The president of a Syrian Armenian NGO said: *"Syria refugees are not being given the refugee status, but stateless status, which is very dangerous. In Armenia, they are in a refugee-like situation, which means that they do not live in tents, but they are still struggling"*. A participant described the trip: *"I came by bus passing from Turkey in a journey that lasted more than 37 hours. Terrorists stopped us on the road and asked for money, as they wanted to kidnap us".[414]* She added: *"In Syria I know that in the beginning of the revolution, they wanted to protect Armenians, but then the bombing started. So I soon left, I left my stuff and my memories there. At least I am safe in Armenia"*.

In Yerevan, interviewees used the category of the Armenian Genocide to describe the forced migratory experience and the refugee-like situation. All the Syrian Armenian interviewees expressed a shared attachment to what they consider the Syrian homeland. The exodus was defined using the genocide category. A participant said:

> *Before the war [the Syrian conflict of 2011], everybody was in very good condition in Syria; we had equal rights as Syrians. Now we are witnessing a second displacement. Syria was the homeland. This is the feeling of the genocide, the forced leaving of the homeland.*

Another participant defined the exodus as a "second genocide":

> *Syria is the first and the best country that welcomed Armenians. This is what I call a second genocide. In fact, Turkey plays an important role in the Syrian war. Turkish troops were targeting Armenians, their belongings and churches, especially in the Deir ez-Zor region[415], where the first settlers*

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[413] Calin-Stefan (2014).

[414] Interview, participant 1, Yerevan.

[415] The region is also known as Euphrates valley, the first area of settlement for Armenian victims of the Genocide. See also Fuat Dündar. (2011). "Pouring a people into the desert: The 'definitive solution' of the unionists to the Armenian question". in Suny, R. G., Gocek, F. M. and Naimark, N. M. (eds.) *A question of genocide: Armenians and Turks at the end of the Ottoman Empire*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 280–281.

came and there is the museum of the genocide that was bombed and ruined.
Displacement is a genetic part of Armenians.

The refugee-like condition and the use of the force in Syria that also hit the Armenian community made them talk about a second genocide.

The situation was aggravated because the Armenian state could not economically provide for their relocation in Armenia. The Armenian state cannot provide for all the needs of current returnees, because it "could not afford such assistance".[416] The Armenian economy is one of the most disadvantaged economies of the post-USSR.[417] The limits and the legacies of a long history of unequal and tragic struggle persisted also after post-Soviet independence[418] representing obstacles for a full "social and economic modernization".[419] The economic difficulty is well explained by one respondent who is a service provision analyst in Armenia: "*The lack of job opportunities and low salaries in spite of high expenses do not allow Syrian Armenians to survive here*".

A large number of Syrian Armenians who participated in this study experienced displacement due to a discrepancy between procedural assistance on the first entry to Armenia, and difficulties in settlement.[420] The interview responses on this topic suggest general disillusion towards the ethnic homeland and convey the idea of diaspora of diaspora at best. A UNHCR local Armenian representative explained:

> *Syrian Armenians as refugees had the concession of travel documents,*
> *Armenian passport and citizenship. However, nationality and citizenship*
> *are not always identical. We do not say ethnic in Armenia, but we have one*
> *of the strongest identity problems: we are screaming about our nationality,*
> *but nationality does not belong to us. In ideology, Armenia is home. In*
> *practice, the myth of the Armenian homeland and the dream of the*
> *motherland got destroyed when Syrian Armenians arrived here. The*
> *paradox consists of the tangible dreams they left behind and the destruction*
> *of the dream of the motherland.*

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[416] Gasparyan (2016), p. 213.
[417] Gasparyan (2016), p. 224.
[418] Gasparyan (2016), p. 190.
[419] Suny, R. (1993). *Looking toward Ararat: Armenia in modern history.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p. 221.
[420] Miscellaneous interviews.

She referred to concepts traditionally associated with diaspora like home, homeland, dream, myth, identity and nationality. The Armenian homeland is a classic instance of the imagined homeland that does not correspond with the real one. She added:

> *Most of them are heading for a better place. The displacement is still vital; they have identical needs to other refugees, and seek the possibility to go somewhere else. They feel stuck, lost; they experience misery and displacement. By giving the documents to them, you buy them. They are not very keen on joining the cultural life of Yerevan, not even the dancing and singing events. There is a genetic tension inside, a story of loss. Armenia is a spare homeland, a temporary solution, and a back-up country. Refuge is not about ethnicity. Armenians have to compensate from the Soviet period, Syrians from displacement.*

This response is particularly evocative of the intrinsic, traditional and genetic history of diasporisation in the Armenian community since the Genocide. Most Syrian Armenian de-facto refugees frame the conflict-generated migration to Armenia as "part of a chain of events set in motion by the Genocide".[421]

The displacement also relates to the difficulties in adjusting to the Armenian economic system. Some Syrian Armenian returnees come from a specific class of tradesmen and businessmen who were economically successful in Aleppo. According to the spokesman of a Syrian Armenian NGO, "*One third of Syrian Armenians brought their savings so we had to select Syrian people who were really in need before providing aid*". The struggle to integrate in the Armenian economic system is well explained by three interviewees. An American service analyst in Yerevan said:

> *Syrian Armenians were offered money as loans to create start-ups, but the money was called back by taxes they had to pay for their business to be standardised.[422] They are entrepreneurs, ready to start a new life and new business, and very creative. They arrived in a place where the economy is highly controlled by the state and the oligarchs, corruption is widespread and business is highly standardised as well.[423]*

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[421] Laycock (2016).
[422] Interview, participant 2, Yerevan.
[423] Interview, participant 5, Yerevan.

The president of a Syrian Armenian NGO made a similar point: "*They [Syrian Armenians] switched from a non-communist regime and a free-market economy in Syria to a communist regime, a controlled market regime";* along with a local Armenian UNHCR representative: "*Syrian people did not see the Soviet past and are different from us: the locals are timid, uneducated about business while they are entrepreneurs*".[424]

Because of unfamiliarity with the Armenian economic regime, Syrian Armenians re-opened the businesses they once had in Syria in Armenia. The UNHCR representative said: "*They brought new breath, they are courageous and resilient, talented, plenty of skills to donate*". On the other hand, she claimed that this economic strategy was not always successful:

> *They tried replicating the Syrian way of life, but it could not work here.*
> *That is why Syrian Armenians are together always like in a ghetto here.*
> *There is not a Syrian Armenian community, but they prefer to stay together*
> *as a group. Syrian Armenians had their little Aleppo, and they are*
> *maintaining their little Aleppo.*

Economic issues impacted the cultural differences between local Armenians and Syrian Armenians. The gap between diasporan Armenians and Armenians of the ex-Soviet Union has deep historic roots and many practical implications, addressed in another study on Syrian Armenians repatriated with a historic perspective.[425] Suny, for one, presents the linguistic, cultural, social, political and economic differences between Western and Eastern Armenians, each of them "developing their own dialectics" and "separated by international borders, hostile political regimes and frequent warfare".[426]

The implications of the difference also include discrimination and feelings of otherness. For the president of a Syrian Armenian NGO, the greatest difference is of contextual background:

> *In practice, for everyday life issues, such as medical procedures, our*
> *association maintains the link with workers who were operating in Syria*
> *because they understand the needs of Armenians from Syria better than the*

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[424] Interview, participant 6, Yerevan.
[425] Della Gatta, M. (2017). "A 'nation in exile': The renewed diaspora of Syrian Armenian repatriates." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies,* 1-19.
[426] Suny (1993), p. 221.

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locals.[427]

The feeling of otherness is described by a UNHCR representative: *"After the first impact, there was fear between them and us"*. The interviewee added that discrimination used to be an issue that is now partially resolved and still problematic at school. The use of the "us versus them" narrative suggests the possibility of intra-ethnic differences that are rarely contemplated in the accounts on ethno-politics presented earlier in this thesis.

Overall, the presence of cultural, historical, social and economic barriers impedes the recognition of Armenia as the homeland for Syrian Armenians and renews their diasporic condition. Diaspora in the ancestral homeland includes different social and economic activities that link returnees to the Syrian motherland. The creation of Syrian Armenian NGOs providing special services and social opportunities for Syrian returnees was a way to respond to the lack of humanitarian assistance by the Armenian state at the first arrival. The president of an NGO outlined the range of actions specifically designed for Syrian Armenians:

> *Now I keep organising trainings for Syrian Armenians here and I am chair of the women's committee, to create new job opportunities and sell their products. We also offer socio-psychological support. We maintained and recreated here the Arabic Centre for disabled people first created in Aleppo in 1999. We have the Arabic club in order to provide job opportunities for Arabic language teachers, and the post-family project.*

Along with the "Arabic club" mentioned above, projects include translations into Arabic of Armenian newspapers and the foundation of a school in Armenia for refugees to continue their education following the Syrian curriculum in Arabic.[428] Social observation revealed that Syrian Armenians maintain a high degree of social distinctiveness, preferring to visit places where they can socialise with other Syrian Armenians or places where they feel that they can remember their community in Aleppo. Figure 1 gives an idea of the definitions given by respondents for their identification, in which "Syrian prevails":

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[427] Interview, participant 3, Yerevan.
[428] Calin-Stefan (2014), p. 61.
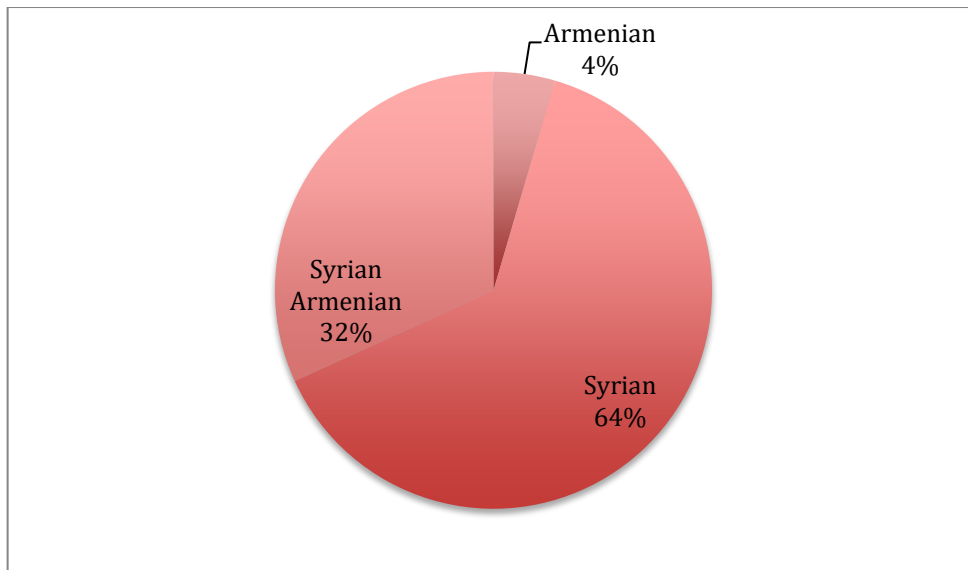
Figure 1: Armenian case study: Identity affiliations

Note: sample size of 48.

According to Hall, diaspora is not necessarily associated with lack of integration and with a sacred homeland. Away from this "imperialising, hegemonising form of ethnicity", Hall defines diaspora identities as "those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference".[429] The experience of dispersal produces saliency of the dispersed centre. As Wald points out, "the sense of groupness generated by collective experiences may manifest in the group tendency to put homeland concerns at the top".[430] It should not be assumed that the experience of diaspora is necessarily linked to marginalisation, alienation and isolation.[431] The elements of the nexus above can coexist in a "plurality of selves", to quote Gramsci again.[432]

Multiple identities and the Syrian Australian diaspora

Khater describes Syrian emigrants in late 1800 (Ottoman, in his case) as "adaptable" to the host country, leaving their nationality and adhering to the nationality of the people, amongst whom they live, forgetting their habits and accepting the habits of the

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[429] Suny (1993), p. 235.
[430] Wald, K. D. (2008). "Homeland interests, hostland politics: Politicized ethnic identity among Middle Eastern heritage groups in the United States." *International Migration Review,* 42 (2) 273-301, p. 277.
[431] Safran (2005), p. 83.
[432] Gramsci (1971).

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land of immigration.[433] In other cases, Syrians maintain a separate identity still linked to the homeland, experiencing isolation of discrimination for such maintenance. However, as Khater convincingly notes, "Most Syrian immigrants rejected this dichotomized existence and worked to create a liminal space between the two" [434], between a full forgetfulness of the Syrian belongingness and a full maintenance of Syrian identity. This is also the case for Armenian diasporans. Suny identifies a hybrid mode of adaptation of diaspora Armenians: between the two extremes of rejection of either Armenian culture (consequent assimilation in the host country) and the dominant culture of the host country, the majority of diaspora Armenians are "involved both in the Armenian community affairs and in the political and cultural world of the dominant society".[435]

This thesis does not take into account the first question of diasporic identity, that is integration[436], rather it considers the political impact of multi-identity and the possibility of liminal spaces between affiliations, as outlined in the theoretical account of Chapter 3. The hybrid experience between a full integration in the host country and marginalisation, between the only maintained and the total abandonment of Syrian identity, is occurring in Armenia and Australia. The liminal space itself has different nuances and the negotiation between the Syrian identity and the identity of the hostland can lead to different results.

When dealing with Armenian and Syrian diaspora groups, the elements of "return" or "impossibility of return", and the "loss of the homeland" are the constituencies of the relation with Syria, and the consequent negotiation with the host culture. Khater refers to cases in which Syrian people were Americanised in terms of habits but remained Syrian in "political belonging"[437] or vice versa. In any case, dealing with a diaspora-like situation, one must expect the maintenance of Syrian-ness (and/or Armenian-ness) belonging in the social, cultural and political realm.

The interaction between past experiences of settlement and unprecedented displacement and the presence of double attachments is particularly evident in Syrian Australian communities. A first generation of immigrants from Syria witnessed the conflict from outside and the arrival of a new wave of Syrian refugees. This makes

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[433] Intellectuals such as Juriji Zaydan, Shibli Shumayl, Farah Antoun, and Dawud Aoun.
[434] Khater (2005), p. 309.
[435] Suny (1993), p. 217.
[436] Brown (1985).
[437] Khater (2005), p. 309.

them renegotiate the relationship with the Syrian motherland within the multicultural structures of the Australian homeland. The important distinction between voluntary and enforced conflict-generated diasporas is noted for the extensive case study with Syrian Australians. Most of the participants migrated to Australia in the 1970s mostly for economic and political reasons. It is evident that the uprising, followed by conflict, produced a reattachment to Syria and renewed the link to the Syrian homeland, which makes the distinction more blurred.

Systematic social observation with members of Syrian Australian associations in Sydney and Melbourne showed that Australians with Syrian descent feel they are both Australian and Syrian. Survey responses on identity affiliation showed the prevalence of Australian identity, as shown in Figure 2.
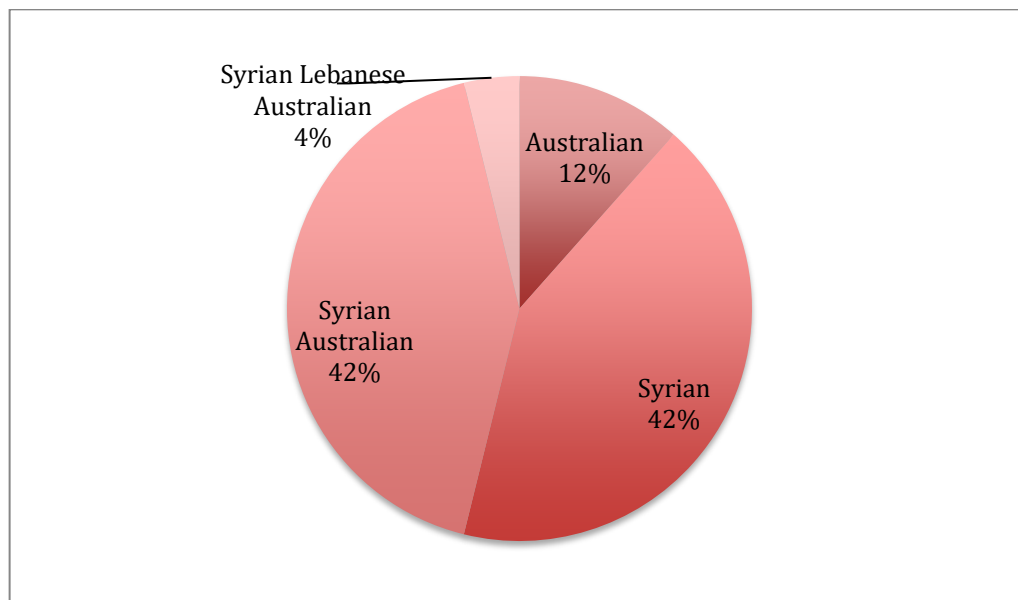
Figure 2: Australian case study: Identity affiliations
Note: sample size of 37.

The coexistence of Syrian and Australia identity, along with the Christian one for Christians, is predominant. The other responses are diverse and indicate the multi-layered nature of Syrian Australian identity. For 9% of respondents, Australian identity prevails, while for 6% the Syrian identity prevails. A participant wrote that "this question does not make sense to me, we are all Syrians".[438] An interviewee explained: "*Most of the Syrians feel that they belong to Syria and respect the Australian soil. I think that they are willing to be involved in the Australian community*".

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[438] Survey results, participant 26.

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Australians with Syrian descent who were born in Australia or had been living in Australia for more than twenty years are leaders of the associations and help new arrivals to settle in the new country. A participant said:

> *I was an engineer and now I am a teacher. I moved from Syria 25 years ago. In the Syrian community I help to organise events for Syrian people, workshops, gatherings and so forth. Now Syrians are building their own community independently from the Lebanese and the Arab community in Sydney, because of the new arrivals and the rising number of Syrians.*[439]

A participant explained that he wanted to meet the new Syrian comers and help them:

> *I would not have met all my Syrian friends from different and far areas of Syria if I had stayed in Syria. Some of our relatives are still there, so we are worried about them and trying to bring them here where they can be safe. The situation is getting worse and worse for Syrians. I love Syrian culture, I write on Syria, I comment on the events in Syria, I teach.*[440]

Although the majority of participants were born in Australia or moved to Australia a long while ago, all of them said they follow the events in Syria very closely because they still maintain a relationship with Syria. Some still have relatives and friends in Syria, others have properties and others said that they are interested in what is happening in Syria because it is the "country of my parents".[441] The willingness to help is expressed also by the spokesman of a Syrian association in Melbourne: "*Once the uprising erupted we put together an association to help Syrian people struggling in Syria with food and winter clothing trucks in the borders with Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon*".

In Melbourne, a Syrian woman founded a diaspora-focused magazine called "Beloved Syria".[442] She said that in the beginning she thought of the magazine as a way to show Australian people how Syria was before the conflict and to inform them about Syrian culture. In the third and last available issue, the scope has slightly changed, since she also wanted to collect stories of Syrians who migrated to Australia after the conflict. She said:

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[439] Interview, participant 1, Sydney.
[440] Interview, participant 2, Sydney.
[441] Side comments, survey results.
[442] http://www.belovedsyria.com.au/ (accessed on 23 January 2017).

Syrian identity is not well expressed in Australia yet, but it will soon be as more people are coming and want to show that they are proud to be Syrian. The magazine aims to be a platform for them to express their ways to be Syrian and show that Syrian people have a lot to offer to Australia.

The stories reported in the magazine also show that Syrians have successfully settled in Australia without giving up their identity.

Return and attachment narratives

Another important general question for the definition of displacement as a diaspora-like situation is return. Whether or not the difficulty of recognising Armenia as the homeland will translate into return to Syria for Syrian Armenians and for Syrians in Australia is not predictable. A large number of Syrian Armenians who moved to Yerevan decided to leave Armenia. The Armenian Minister of Diaspora did not provide statistical estimates and declined involvement in the study, but there are fewer newcomers in 2017 than in 2012. A participant, also working in collaboration with the ministry, estimated that nearly one third of the estimated 17,000 Syrian Armenians applied for Armenian citizenship. The president of an independent Syrian NGO said: "*Overall, they cannot settle, many are going back to Aleppo or heading towards Lebanon for a visa*". A local Armenian taking care of the Syrian Armenian issue for UNHCR reported in October 2016 that new arrivals are rare.

Expression of willingness to return to Syria is an indicator of the possibility of reverse homecoming. When asked about a possible future return, the majority of interviewees in Armenia said that they would eventually return to Syria, as Figure 3 shows:
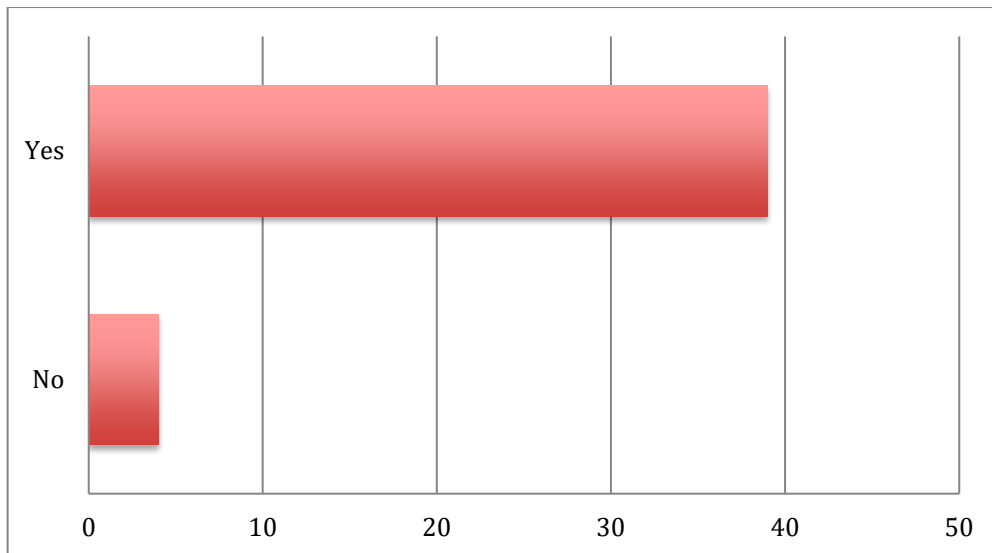
Figure 3: Armenian case study: Return to Syria

Note: Sample size of 48.

A Syrian Armenian student who runs a shop of Syrian sweets in Yerevan said: *"I would like to go back to Syria because I love my country and I love my state, which in the future will be a strong and human state"*.[443] The impossibility of returning to Syria is also expressed by a young woman running a falafel kiosk:

> *Even though there is no intentional aim against Armenians as there was in the genocide, we lost our memory and everyone hoped to go back to Aleppo. But at the moment it is impossible, because the culture of killing is rooted deep, especially these days.*

Only 3 of the 60 interviewees expressed unwillingness to return Syria, with the rest (24%) being unsure. The condition for a permanent return explained by the majority is the end of the war. The rest of those who want to go back to Syria said that they would "when Syria is a safe country again".[444] When asked about the reasons for the return, many reported, "*because I was born there and it is my country*". One interviewee said: "*I will go back to Syria to see my homeland, visit my ancestors and its growth"*, and another explained: "*Because in Aleppo we had a better life"*.[445]

The results from the Australian case study on return show that Syrians in Australia are more sceptical about a return. This is mostly because, unlike Armenia, Australia is a

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[443] Miscellaneous interviews.
[444] Miscellaneous interviews.
[445] Miscellaneous interviews.

wealthy country, rich in work opportunities and welfare assistance. All the participants with the exception of one said that they want to go back to Syria. However, the purposes and the conditions for the return are more diverse than in the Armenian case study, as shown in Figure 3.
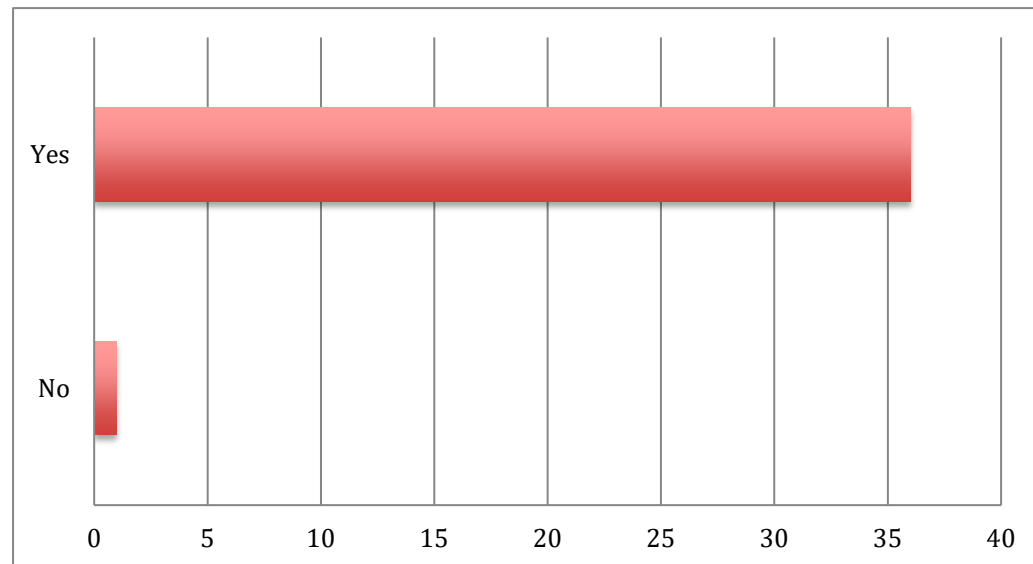
Figure 4: Australian case study: Return to Syria

Note: Sample size of 37.

A majority of Syrian Australians decided that they would like to go back to Syria to visit friends and relatives once the war is finished. This is different from the Armenian case study, where the majority opted for a permanent return. Responses were very diverse and included the possibility of relocating permanently to Syria to a lesser extent, provided that Syria is a safe state.[446]

The responses to the open-ended question "why would/would not you go back to Syria?" convey devoted attachment to the Syrian homeland. All participants wrote answers to this open-ended question that denote affectionate definitions of Syria as "*the place of my relatives*", "*the land of my fathers*" or "*my father's home*". Participants who opted for a definite return explained this is "*because I love this country*", "*I love my home Syria*"[447], "*my treasure*" or "*because I would like to spend the rest of my life in my homeland*". Other reasons for the return included "*to see my family and the house I grew up in*" or "*to visit my relatives*". The only participant who

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[446] 7 out of 37 participants.
[447] This expression is used three times.

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opted for a non-return explained, *"Syria is my first country"*. The "end of the hostilities" and the "return to normality" were the most used expressions for conditions to return.

4.3 Diasporic political communities

Diasporic mobilisation

The political dimension is one of the four main characteristics of traditional diasporas and occurs when a mobilised collective identity generates co-ethnic solidarities, also transnational.[448] Diaspora communities often represent "political and economic resources for those left in the homeland".[449] There are cases in which the political organisation and cultural production make part of a coherent "politics of exile", willing to empower exiles to live as a collective or to emphasise their situation.[450] It also depends on the context of the host countries. Both Armenia and Syria are states interested in diaspora engagement politics, to which supportive or oppositional politics of exile in Armenia and Australia are likely to correspond.

In the realm of politicised identities, the process of reproduction described by Hall has to do with "regenerating a sense of common identity and political organizations", as Brown clarifies.[451] Brown explains what, in his view, is an underexplored relationship between politics and transnational diasporic identities. This account is valuable since it moves away from the portrayal of diasporic identity as politically and culturally disruptive. Such accounts focus only on defensive strategies by the majority population towards diaspora and neglect the solidarity-generating aspect of it. In fact, diaspora communities are transnational in the sense that a form of political solidarity amongst them goes across the borders of the nation-state regardless of geographical proximity or distance.[452] Diasporic communities can represent one of many different forms of transnational communities.[453]

Brown identifies four political questions involved with diasporic sensibility and identity formation: integration, mobilisation, transnational political solidarity, and the

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[448] Cohen (2008), p. 7.
[449] Suny, (1993), p. 214.
[450] Suny, (1993), p. 221.
[451] Brown in Qayson and Daswani (eds.) (2013). *A companion to transnationalism and diaspora.* Blackwell, p. 78.
[452] Brown (2013), p. 72.
[453] On the debate surrounding diaspora and transnationalism see Faist (2010).

creation of new cosmopolitan identities. [454] Leaving aside integration and cosmopolitism, for the purposes of this thesis, the questions posed by Brown surrounding political mobilisation and transnationalism are extremely relevant:

> How these transnational groups politically mobilize themselves, what political and cultural iconography is assembled in order to maintain a sense of common membership, and what sorts of group behaviour can be recognized as having a distinct political dimension? [455]

Group behaviour and common membership associated with the homeland do not always produce the mobilisation of the members around a shared political objective. In order to evaluate the nature of diasporic identity, the first step of enquiry consists of asking whether diaspora communities organise themselves as a political community in the host country. According to Brown, a political community is composed of "a combination of moral, cultural and institutional structures" and aims to "sustain a common political identity". [456] The membership can also be maintained or recreated in diaspora. Is a form of political membership at stake in Syrian diaspora communities?

The reconstruction of a common identity in diaspora can imply a form of political identity, which depends on the degree of mobilisation of the group. Brown outlines three degrees of political commitment: association forms, designated community halls for common events, and more engaged forms of political activism. Following Gramsci and Brown, the cultural "frames"[457] of the political mobilisation are no less important than political activism for evaluating the strength and the longevity of political identification. In particular, iconography, "shared history" and expressions of "common roots"[458] of the homeland are important indicators.

Political diasporas in Australia and Armenia

The political meaning of diaspora, something that is emerging from studies on Syrian communities outside Syria, is particularly evident in the fieldwork with Syrians in Australia. Khater notes that the immigrants from the Ottoman Empire, before the First World War, chose to be called "Syrians" (as a way of distinguishing themselves from

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[454] Brown (2013), p. 72.
[455] Brown (2013).
[456] Brown (2013), p. 69.
[457] Gramsci (1971).
[458] Smith, A. (2001). "Will and sacrifice: images of national identity." *Millennium,* 30 (3), 571-582, p. 576

"Turks") but at that time "Syrian" was not an act of political or ideological engagement.[459] Ottoman emigrants were not distinguished according to what we now call their nationality. The First World War that caused the collapse of empires to give space to emergent nation-states was also a turning point for the identification of Syrian diaspora communities that witnessed the formation of their national homeland from abroad. Since 1915, Syrians in exile have been increasingly politicised and started to develop ways to participate in the political life of the homeland.

Fahrenthold demonstrates that with the outbreak of the First World War, Syrian and Lebanese diasporans, especially journalists and intellectuals, in Egypt, North and South America supported the Reform movement in 1915 that sought autonomy from the Turkish dominance. Transnational activism included fundraising, the creation of a network of journalists, publishers and politicians, and even the formation of a military body supported by France "Légion d'Orient". [460] As Fahrenthold explains, the Légion d'Orient was an irregular regiment of Syrian, Lebanese and Armenian volunteers from across the diaspora.[461]

Fahrenthold identifies this as the first expression of long-distance nationalism, which continued later during the French Mandate. In the 1920s Syrian diasporans were divided into those who collaborated with the French rule participating in censuses and/or applying for citizenship and those who supported the anti-colonial movement. [462] The 1950s and 1960s represented a new phase for national consciousness in the Middle East[463] creating a platform for transnational activism.

In recent times, after the outbreak of the conflict in 2011, as noted by Jörum in her research on Syrians in Sweden, on the one hand, Syria pursues diaspora policies in the host countries; on the other hand, there are instances of Syrian political activism and engagement continuing in the host countries.[464] The dynamic has to do with the contraposition between the Syrian regime aiming to gain support in diaspora

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[459] Khater (2005), p. 304.
[460] Fahrenthold, S. (2013). "Transnational modes and media: The Syrian press in the Mahjar and emigrant activism during World War I". *Mashriq & Mahjar Journal of Middle East and North African Migration Studies,* 1 (1), 30-54, p. 40.
[461] Fahrenthold (2013).
[462] Fahrenthold, S. (2014). *Making nations, in the Mahjar: Syrian and Lebanese long-distance nationalisms in New York City, São Paulo, and Buenos Aires, 1913-1929,* ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, p. 48.
[463] Anderson, B. (2002). "The duality of national identity in the Middle East: A critical review". *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies,* 11 (2), 229-250, p. 230.
[464] Jörum, E. L. (2015). "Repression across Borders: Homeland response to anti-regime mobilization among Syrians in Sweden." *Diaspora Studies,* 8(2), pp. 104-119, p. 107.

communities worldwide and opposition groups mobilising for the fall of the regime.[465] Activist groups are active on social media and through institutional frameworks across different countries such as Germany, the United Kingdom, Canada and Turkey.

This kind of political activism sees a minor replication in Armenia and, particularly, in Australia. The outcomes of general diasporic feelings of the Australian case study have a different significance, less sentimental and more political, due to a number of factors that include length of settlement in the host country, contextual differences and methodological variances. In Armenia, many interviewees admitted that they were not interested in or aware of Syrian politics, even saying that it is something they dislike.[466] Syrian Australians, on the contrary, expressed interest in the debate between the supporters of the regime and opposition groups.

All the surveyed participants in both case studies indicated that they follow the events in Syria and contribute in different ways to the situation in Syria. The results of the survey on contribution were diverse and respondents selected all the options including humanitarian assistance, donations, public manifestations, contact and exchange of information. Humanitarian assistance and contact were slightly more common in both the case studies. While in Australia the contribution is also political (see below), in Armenia, the contribution is mostly a form of contact and solidarity with close friends or other members of the community. In the side comments, participants explained that they participate with small donations to public institutions and to private beneficiaries such as "*I am helping a friend to survive the war financially; we have been friends since we were in Kindergarten*". Another form was religious, and some said that they contribute "praying" for Syrian people and especially for "*all Armenian boys from 18 to 30 who were helping the Armenian people in Syria in all ways*". The contribution in the Armenian case study is apolitical and community-driven, because only Syrians of Armenia could resettle in Armenia.

The political side of this renewed diaspora in Armenia has more to do with the state-driven diaspora policies that the Armenian community of Syria was subjected to. Participants expressed their views on the process of granting an Armenian visa to Syrian Armenians. During social observation, participants were interested in discussing visa matters, especially the possibility of acquiring a new visa with an Armenian passport. For reasons linked with the legacy of the Genocide, many do not

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[465] Jörum (2015).
[466] Miscellaneous interviews.

consider Turkey as an alternative. An interviewee said:

> *Visa is a problem for Syrian Armenians. With an Armenian passport you*
> *cannot do anything. Syria is still imprinted on my Armenian passport. I do*
> *not want to go to Lebanon, because it is expensive and risky.*[467]

More politically engaged details are given by an expert in local Armenian issues, who commented directly on Armenian diaspora policies in the Middle East and in Syria:

> *For welcoming Syrians, Armenia became attracted by Europe, but this is a*
> *selected immigration (unwritten condition: they need to be Christian, they*
> *were asked about their baptism). Besides, it was a mission for Armenia to*
> *be active in the Middle East and to host Christians that fled Muslim*
> *countries. At the same time, the Armenian government is getting frustrated*
> *that there will no longer be Armenian communities there. So the policies go*
> *intermittently: in 2012 Armenia opened its arms, in 2013 it pushed Syrian*
> *Armenians to stay there [in Syria] sending aid. After, things went very bad*
> *in Syria, the Armenian government praised Syrians in front of the locals to*
> *encourage Syrian Armenians to stay in Armenia.*[468]

Another interviewee running a local Syrian Armenian NGO explained that the Armenian community of Aleppo used to maintain a link with the Armenian homeland in terms of investments:

> *The Minister of Diaspora appointed me as advisor to represent the Syrian*
> *community here. After independence, Aleppo was the community closest to*
> *Armenia, so that Syrian Armenians had motherland relations in terms of*
> *vacation, houses and investment.*[469]

From the interviews, there is evidence that Armenia and Syria are connected by the mutual relationship between the Armenian state and Syrian Armenians also because of the existence of the Armenian communities in Syria.

This interview reveals another important aspect of the return of Syrian Armenians to Armenia, that is, the political approach of the Republic of Armenia towards Armenians in Syria. The Armenian Minister of Diaspora declined to

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[467] Interview, participant 1, Yerevan.
[468] Interview, participant 3, Yerevan.
[469] Interview, participant 2, Yerevan.

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participate in this study. However, from the information provided by service analysts and local agencies in Armenia working closely with the ministry, it is known that in the beginning the Armenian government sent aid to protect and assist Armenians in Syria because the presence of the Armenian community there was vital for maintaining Armenian economic relations with the Middle East. After the escalation of the conflict, and the very unsafe situation, Armenia implemented a return or repatriation program specifically designed for Armenians from Syria with the political aim of drawing the attention of the international community towards Armenia hoping for flows of humanitarian aid to the country. Another political hope was an Armenian territorial claim that began with the previous repatriation (1945).[470]

The Armenian government approach of letting Syrian Armenians stay in Syria first and then accepting them as refugees is interestingly also reflected in the response of an interviewee representing the Armenian community of Sydney:

> *In the beginning, our leaders wanted the Syrian Armenian community to stay in Syria and fight for their home country. But, then, the human side prevailed and we launched the program. So, we started to work to help Syrian Armenians to flee from the war in Syria in 2011. We launched a paid migration scheme with the government in 2012, which saw a dozen families arriving pretty quickly. In 2013 and 2014 we had the same numbers, then in the last two years the scheme has been less successful and slower than the mainstream with the UN. In five years we have roughly 600 people widespread in Australia (mostly in Sydney and Melbourne) and mostly from Aleppo. With the leaders of the community and the parish, we try to raise the Armenian and Christian cause for accelerating the migration progress. I also help future refugees applying from Lebanon with the application. If they have a case, they have lost a close family member, their homes and/or their businesses; they share similar stories of loss.[471]*

The mobilisation of the Syrian diaspora in Australia also includes intervention in the process of accepting refugees from Syria, as emerged from the interviews.

The acceptance of the refugees in Australia is a topic that a member of the Alawi community in Sydney felt was problematic:

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[470] Suny (1993), p. 167; Della Gatta (2017).
[471] Interview, participant 5, Sydney.

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Our community has a mosque and a school. We teach the second generation how to love Australia and how to love Syria: language, history and the good way to be Muslim and to live with other religions. Syria will be their future country.

Personally I love Australian law to the extent that I volunteer for the court in Liverpool. However, not all are like me. They are allowing having Wahhabi schools here that teach Islam in the wrong way. Their preaching is against Islam. I think that in 13,000 refugees from Syria, 1000 are ISIS supporters from the desert areas where uneducated people who believed in those ideals [live]. We don't want these people here.[472]

A representative for an Australian Syrian association in Victoria had a completely different view from that above, but also said that the preference is to help Syrian people stay in Syria first:

Once the uprising escalated we organised to help Syrian people struggling in Syria and with food and winter clothing trucks in the borders with Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. As a policy, we prefer Syrian people to stay in Syria that's why we would have been very happy if the international community accepted Turkey's proposal in 2014 on a free fly zone.[473]

The same participant had a different approach towards Australia's refugee intake and its composition:

As an organisation, we joined the talks with the Australian government to not limit to minorities the acceptance of an extra intake of 12,000 from Syria and Iraq. Statistics on the composition of Syrian refugees accepted are not available, but we know that it is easier for minorities to obtain a visa because they are thought to be religiously persecuted. The Syrian majority is even more fragile than the minorities, but I was told that they were screening refugees carefully to avoid the entrance of terrorists in the country. [474]

The interview with the representative of the Australian Syrian Association was lengthy

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[472] Interview, participant 4, Sydney.
[473] Interview, participant 8, Melbourne.
[474] Interview, participant 8, Melbourne.

and covered three main political issues, including the minority versus majority issue (addressed in the next chapter in depth), and the involvement of the Australian Syrian community in Syria and in Syria-related matters. The two major topics are democracy and regime opposition:

> *We started the association as soon as the uprising began, before that, there was no association or community linked to Syria here in Australia. We started letting people informed about the events in Syria to support the uprising and democracy in the country. Activities include talks and public peaceful manifestations.[475]*

When the conversation moved to the discussion of the regime in Syria, a form of political polarisation is evident:

> *Here in Melbourne, Syrian people are divided into our organisation and a pro-Assad one. We tried to get together in a few talks but we have opposed political views so we couldn't unite. We live in a democratic country, so everyone is free to express his or her ideas. There have been incidents when they tried to stop one of our information meetings when we had to call the police and few other minor incidents unfortunately.*

The presence of two different associations, one supporting the actual regime in Syria and the other one aligning with the opposition, and reportedly clashes between them suggest that the Syrian community of Australia is separated into two groups marked by their different political positions on the conflict. The other association mentioned by the interviewee could not participate in this study because representatives had a tragic family loss at that time. A participant who was said to be close to that association reported:

> *The Syrian identity is not very well expressed in Australia, but I think that they will soon open Syrian restaurants or Syrian businesses. The presence of different political views does not help the formation of a Syrian identity. I have heard of some Muslim Syrians that were not against that regime that are now incorporated in the Sunni Lebanese community of Australia and are not with the rebels. Many people supporting the rebels got upset*

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[475] Interview, participant 9, Melbourne.

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because they do not feel represented by the Caliphate. People are no longer optimistic about Syria after the recent events, because the evil comes and goes.[476]

It starts to become evident that the division in pro-Assad versus opposition groups implies an oversimplification of Syrian politics in diaspora that single subjects do not always endorse. In this case, the interviewee could not admit to supporting the regime, neither could she assert to sympathising with rebel groups that want to implement a Caliphate in Syria. An interviewee in Sydney said:

I love culture, I write, I comment on events in Syria, I teach, I am active politically. I was manifesting in Sydney holding the Syrian flag and a photo of Bashar al-Assad [...] I do not support him because I love him, but I know that he and only him can protect us from extremists in Syria.[477]

Even though this is a clear statement of support, it does not express uncritical adherence to the regime. The existence of liminal spaces between identities, affiliations and political orientations is clear. A representative of the Australian Syrian Association in Sydney clarified that not all Syrian Christians are loyal to the regime:

In the Syrian community I help organise events for Syrian people, workshops, gatherings and peaceful demonstrations. We do not talk about politics often, but sometimes a group of us feels that we have to raise our voice and our political identity for the sake of democracy. We collaborate with a few Christians who do not support the regime and share our laic values.

In Armenia, where Syrian Armenians are thought to be close to the regime, while Syrian political activism is absent, there are few voices of political dissent. An interviewee, working at the museum of Yerevan, said:

My work in the museum has to do with translations and the history of Armenians during the Ottoman Empire. Intellectual work here is distant from civil society and has to do with history and literature. Intellectuals live

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[476] Interview, participant 7, Melbourne.
[477] Interview, participant 3, Sydney.

in fear, even more so in Syria as far as politics is concerned.[478]

A young Syrian Armenian writer expanded on the difficulty in diaspora discussing Syria because of a hostile political environment in the homeland. He handed over a copy of his booklet and said: *"Read the book and you will find all the answers. This is also about my passage from Syria to Armenia"*. The booklet is a semi-autobiographical allegoric collection of memories and thoughts, with much on Syria and Syrian identity.

The writer describes himself as "far from reality", devoting his life to "studying, learning, participating in civil society", but never living the life one day, "remaining in a futile museum". The writer is "the citizen of *taḥfa* with the meaning of masterpiece", "from the heart of the museum". Even though a form of criticism, sometimes ironic, towards this condition, which can be extended to the role of the intellectuals in Syria, and the Syrian situation, is evident from the book, the writer embodies the described role. He does not try to subvert the distance of the intellectual from reality; he still remains in his *turris eburnea*, which is also an escape from the atrocities of the war in Syria.

The external ineptitude of the intellectual emerges, as well as the inability to participate due to the repressive political environment or to find his own space. The element of diaspora, the unsuitability of the writer in a physical realm that forces him to move to a nowhere, to a place far from history and geography, is consistently present in the booklet. In particular, this is articulated in a passage that reverses a biblical parabola. Instead of being blessed by being united by the divine force, Jacob is told by the angel in his dream that his descendants will be forced to move to a generic "abroad". The Syrian writer identifies the dispersion not only as the result of the conflict but also as the fulfilment of the prophecy: "This country will suffer from social aridity and political drought".[479] The reversed divination represents the tragic fate of an entire population as it was in the ancient scriptures, that of Syrians and their country.

The dispersion that transpires from the booklet is reflected in the responses of most of the participants. Many reported having family members spread across different countries (Lebanon, Canada, the United States, Sweden and Germany were the most frequently cited) and shared stories and experiences of their divergent trajectories.[480]

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[478] Interview, participant 12, Yerevan.
[479] Bassil, S. (2015). *Mudhakkarāt mwāṭin taḥfa (Memories of a Citizen of a Masterpiece* [in Arabic]). The Hague: Globally-connected.
[480] Miscellaneous interviews.

The Syrian diaspora, while not large in numbers, has been dispersed for some time across the world in Africa, Latin America, North America, Europe and Australia. Those who migrated before 2011 are now seeing friends and relatives moving to different places or even reuniting. Those who were forced to flee the current conflict had to leave loved ones and everything behind in Syria.[481]

The conflict-generated displacement impacted both the old and new generations of migrants. The latter felt that they could not simply stay and watch the suffering of their co-nationals in Syria and in the country that hosted them as refugees, so they created Syrian Armenian and Syrian Australian associations as support and aid platforms. The dispersal from the Syrian centre makes them converge against the external force that left Syria in ruins. Participant responses on the best definition of the Syrian conflict are shown in Figure 5 for Syrian Armenians and in Figure 6 for Syrian Australians.
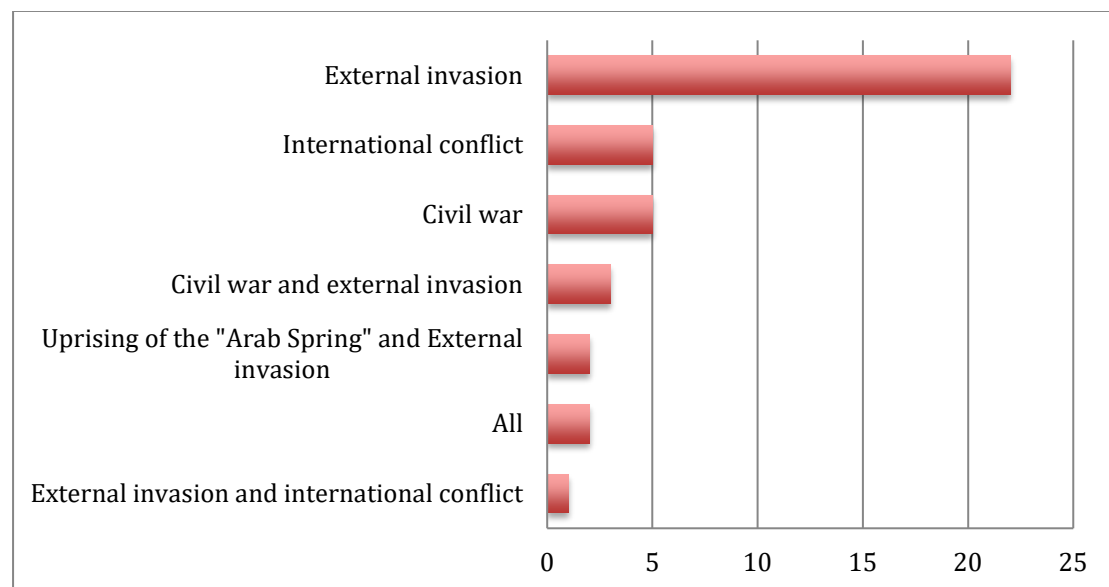
Figure 5: Armenian case study: Best description of the situation in Syria

Note: Sample size of 48. Options: "Civil war"; "Sectarian violence"; "External invasion"; "International conflict"; "Uprising of the 'Arab Spring'"; "I do not know"; "Other". "Sectarian violence" = 0

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[481] Miscellaneous interviews.

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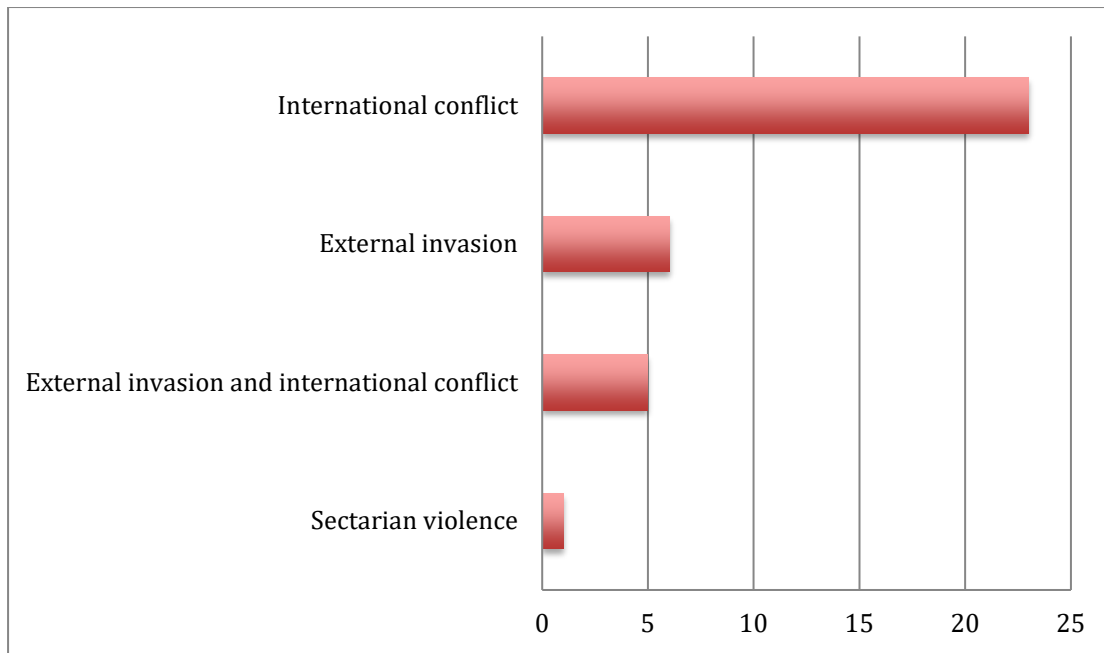
Figure 6: Australian case study: Best description of the situation in Syria

Note: Sample size of 37. Options: "Civil war"; "Sectarian violence"; "External invasion"; "International conflict"; "Uprising of the 'Arab Spring'"; "I do not know"; "Other". "Civil war" = 0; "uprising of the 'Arab Spring'" = 0.

Nearly half the participants in Armenia selected "external invasion" as the best definition for the conflict in Syria, while two thirds of Syrians in Australia chose "international conflict". Both the definitions suggest that Syrian diasporans see the conflict as having an impact beyond the Syrian borders. The vast majority of participants commented on this question saying that Syria is the target of major international powers.[482] The creation of an external other is an important factor in the formation of a common national identity. The evidence this has happened despite the political polarisation that has occurred due to the conflict is an important revelation discussed in later chapters.

4.4 Conclusion

The attachment to Syria expressed by Syrians in exile is the result of the conflict-generated displacement that has also had an impact on Syrians who migrated decades before the current Syrian conflict. The conflict has impacted on Syrian identity in exile underpinning the importance of historical events for identification. The participant responses show that the link with the Syrian homeland has been maintained and it has

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[482] Miscellaneous interviews.

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been redefined after the tragedy of Syria post-2011. The fluid and multi-layered and situational nature of identitarian feelings is particularly evident in the experience of Syrian diasporans in Armenia and Australia.

In this chapter, "place" was a determining factor in the definition of the Syrian diasporan community. In Armenia, the condition of dispersal that follows the peculiar form of enforced repatriation was defined through the lens of genocide. For Syrian Armenians the leaving of the Syrian home country caused by the crisis in Syria was a catastrophic experience that made them re-consider the connection of their community to Syria. In Australia, the acceptance of refugees made the creation of a distinct Australian Syrian community possible. In both cases, the results conform to the characteristic features of enforced diaspora at three different levels: moral, cultural and institutional.

The moral side is conveyed by the recurrent expression "Syria is the first country". This means that respondents prioritise concerns about the Syrian homeland. They do not only closely follow the events, but also contribute in different ways to the homeland, as explained in the interviews. Transnational solidarity networks are also in place in Armenia and Australia. As shown in the interviews and the survey, in Australia and Armenia the nature of political mobilisation is more complex than a political polarisation between support and opposition of the regime. In Armenia, the humanitarian, the human and the cultural side prevailed. In Australia, the diaspora was more politically engaged.

The cultural aspect of the diaspora is evident in the emergence of a Syrian cultural distinctiveness in both countries. This leads to the saliency of the Syrian identity that is predictable when dealing with communities dispersed and hit by a conflict. Cultural distinctiveness emerges in both the case studies. In Armenia, the inter-ethnic difference with local Armenians led Syrian Armenians to create their own cultural space where remembrance of the "little Aleppo" is dominant. This also influences the view of the role of the intellectual in both the homeland and the hostland societies, in which a form of intellectual ineptitude is itself an oppositional activity of criticism. In Australia, the newly formed Australian Syrian community is defining itself separately from the well-established Arab and Lebanese community, mostly through information programs. The institutional frame exists in the presence of associations specifically created after the conflict to maintain transnational links and act as aid platforms.

Overall, Syrian communities in Armenia and Australia are basic political

communities at an embryonic stage. While the relation with the homeland is politically maintained (from the process of accepting refugees to assistance directly in Syria), collective activism is absent in the two countries. In Armenia, this is due to a form of political unawareness that was at the basis of the tacit agreement between the Armenian community and the political regime in Syria, as is clear in the next chapter. In Australia, the lack of a collective political identity is justified by a form of political polarisation (pro versus anti-Assad narratives) that tends to oversimplify Syrian politics in diaspora.

Political struggles, especially those that tend to politicise groups on the basis of ethnic and religious identities, impact on communities in exile. The institutional framework is dominant in the responses of Australian Syrian community leaders who speak on behalf of their associations. However, single voices from the communities clearly do not endorse over-politicisation and give shape to liminal spaces within identitarian feeling, between melancholy and resilience, loyalty and resistance.

Chapter 5. Arabism and minority in Syrian national identity

5.1 Introduction

Nationalism and national identity have so far remained somewhat underlying concepts. The attachment to Syria created in the diaspora emerging from the previous chapter is an important indicator of Syrian national belonging. An in-depth analysis of both is essential for understanding Syrian identity formation, especially in the diaspora where the "nation" becomes an even more complicated factor. As Yahya Sadowski puts it, Syrian nationalism is a "popular sentiment", but it has not been developed as an ideology by an intellectual articulation and a political program.[483] The political and ideological weakness of Syrian nationalism seemingly contrasts with the emergence of strong national feelings from below in diaspora.

This chapter addresses the Syrian national question by looking at convergences and divergences between popular nationalism in diaspora and national discourse in modern Syria. The relationship between the two discourses is scrutinised using a Gramscian concept of the "national-popular". Gramsci used the term as a negative counterpart for the inability to connect popular and political national narratives.[484]

In the Syrian case, state-sponsored nationalism has three different versions that can be used simultaneously or interchangeably in the political discourse: Arab nationalism, pan-Syrian nationalism and sub-nationalism. Sub-nationalism has to do with both minority rule in Syria and resorting to sectarian politics, which is the focus of the next chapter. Here, attention is given to the role of the minority/majority issue in the crafting of Syrian nationalism. Keeping in mind the importance of history on national identity, this chapter includes historical background on the formation of the three intertwined national discourses and, taking into account the perspective of Syrians in exile, considers how minorities and national identity interact under the pan-Arab umbrella and whether the views of Syria change after the conflict.

Continuing on with the Gramscian non-reductionist approach articulated in Chapter 3, national subjects are never assumed as passive recipients of official ideologies.[485] Responses stemming from the empirical work demonstrate that there are common narratives that resist or accommodate but never uncritically absorb

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[483] Sadowski, M.Y. (1984). *Political power and economic organization in Syria: the course of state intervention*, 1946-1958. PhD dissertation, p. 148.
[484] The concept is explained in Gramsci (1971), notebook 17.
[485] Hall (1986).

national diktats. A form of disconnection between the "national" and the "popular" leads to questions of the effectiveness of state narratives for driving national identification in periods of political instability.

5.2 Nationalism and identity

A first question concerns national identity formation *per se*. What is the source of national attachments? Following the theories on identity in Chapter 4, the source is not intended to be univocal and given once for all. Many scholars have asked themselves if the nation-as-people or the nation-as-state came first.

In Anderson's view, the nation-as-state came first, and then a series of ideas were invented. He defines the nation as an "imagined political community" for two reasons. Firstly, all the members will never know each other. Secondly, nations consider themselves as limited by boundaries, but boundaries are in fact imagined lines (however natural or political, they are never natural, they do not exist in reality). The idea of speaking a national language is also imagined, and many languages that were considered dialects became official after the birth of a national state (for instance, Norwegian). Massimo D'Azeglio's motto, "we have made Italy, we have to make Italians"[486], is an exemplar slogan supporting that the nation-as-state comes first. This may be true for Syria, whose borders were created by foreign powers through the Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916). Syria, intended as *al-Sham* territory,[487] has a history that predates Sykes-Picot and goes beyond those lines. Khater notes that for migrants from Ottoman Syria in the United States, Syria was linked to an "imagined Phoenician past" and being Syrian did not correspond to specific temporal and spatial frames.[488] The fluctuating nature of Syrian borders makes the recognition of the nation-state even more problematic.

In order to "make Syrians", and, as a consequence, to create the nation-as-people, citizens have to identify themselves with their nation. As Lacroix and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh point out, the body of research that addresses this issue looks at "the ways in which collective memories – understood as social constructs which stand at the core of the formation of 'imagined communities', have played a part in the emergence

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[486] "Fatta l'Italia, bisogna fare gli Italiani". There are historical doubts that this sentence was spoken by Mazzimo D'Azeglio in person, but it is a common trope in the nationalist discourse.
[487] The territories include places currently in Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan.
[488] Khater (2005).

and negotiation of distinctive political identities".[489] This is particularly true in diaspora, a place where memories alter the perception of the national homeland, creating the likelihood that the national becomes less tangible and a more imaginative construct.[490] In the diaspora, the popular side of nationalism, the one that stems from popular culture, is recalled in the remembrance of the homeland and in transnationalism.[491]

The gap between state-sponsored nationalism and popular nationalism is explicable through the Gramscian concept of "national-popular".[492] In Gramsci's view, the category is an end rather than an instrument and, as such, is used as a negative counterpart for the analysis of (Italian, in his case) national identification dictated from above. The national-popular, the coincidence of national discourse and national feelings that leads to a national culture in the wide sense, is able to create a national collective "will" that brings the masses, intended as common citizens, into the national political life.[493] National identity serves both as an instrument of discipline and control and as a basis for counter-hegemonic challenge.

Gramsci observes that when the political notion of nationalism does not reflect the notion of the masses, the term "national" acquires a strict ideological meaning.[494] This means, from the Gramscian perspective, in such cases nationalism is articulated only in the ideological sphere or as a political instrument, without taking into consideration what "national" means "from below".[495] This chapter analyses the ideological nature of state-sponsored nationalism in Syria and its efficacy, through an examination of the responses of Syrian diasporans when asked about Syrian national identity.

As noted by Anderson, the role of the state is a determinant for driving national identification, in particular through forms of "official nationalism".[496] State intervention in this sector involves a dominant group and includes the creation of

[489] Lacroix, T. and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (2013). "Refugee and diaspora memories: The politics of remembering and forgetting". *Journal of Intercultural Studies,* 34 (6), 684-696, p. 687.
[490] Tölölyan, K. (2000). "Elites and Institutions in the Armenian Transnation." Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies, 9(1), pp. 107-136, p. 115.
[491] Tölölyan (2000).
[492] Gramsci (1971).
[493] Gramsci (1971), p. 216.
[494] Gramsci (1971).
[495] Gramsci (1971).
[496] Anderson, B. R. O. G. (2006). *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* London New York: Verso, p. 86.

official school curriculums, the interpretation of history, national propaganda and discourses on the official identity of the nation. [497] Following Chapter 4, the relationship between national people and nationalising states is complex and non-reductionist, meaning that citizens do not always act as they are requested by the state at the superstructural level, and there can be a discrepancy between popular and official forms of nationalism. States can be successful in driving national identification, but citizens are not simply passive recipients.

In the case of Syria, the authoritarian nature of the state poses limits to the creativity of the national popular culture. As Silverstein notes, "the ways in which individuals negotiate what is permissible and not permissible is fundamentally structured by the methods of coercion undertaken by the Ba'athist regime". [498] Censorship on media was severe under Hafez al-Assad, and the Ministry of Culture prohibits critique of the regime and political references, and monitors cultural production. [499] In 2000, with the succession of Bashar al-Assad to power, the control on media and political movements became less severe. The regime tolerated some political parties (nationalists, Nasserites, the Communist Party and the Democratic Arab Socialist Union) and allowed private media outlets to operate alongside the ones owned by the state. [500] However, as Emadi notes, criticism and hostile remarks against the regime and al-Assad's family are strictly prohibited, and the regime blocks websites that promote opposition inside and outside Syria. [501]

In her study of Syrian popular music, Silverstein explains that popular culture can express both compliance and resistance to the political and cultural hegemonies of Ba'athism. [502] In some cases, "performers complied with the dominant worldviews espoused by the regime, similar to the strategic deployment of popular Ba'athist slogans, posters, and visual media"; in other cases, a sub-stratum of creative responses to the political agenda can emerge from popular music. [503] The analysis of the Syrian popular culture in the wide sense is part of the field that shaped people's

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[497] Anderson (2006), p. 99. Anderson links this process to capitalism.
[498] Silverstein, S. (2012). *Mobilizing bodies in Syria: Dabke, popular culture, and the politics of belonging.* ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, p. 36.
[499] Silverstein (2012)*,* p. 37.
[500] Emadi, H. (2011). "Requiem for the Ba'ath Party: Struggle for change and freedom in Syria". *Mediterranean Quarterly,* 22 (4), 62-79, p. 70.
[501] Emadi (2011), p. 71.
[502] Silverstein (2012), p. 36.
[503] Silverstein (2012).

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understanding of their national identity. In this sphere, the scope is to evaluate popular expressions of national attachment. Their relationship with the nationalist program of the regime is an important determinant: do national feelings express compliance and/or resistance to the hegemony of the Ba'athist ideology? If the state is an unproductive source of identification, what are the other sources of national attachment?

5.3 Long-distance national belonging

For the purposes of this chapter, looking in depth at the impact of politicised identities like the pan-Arab and the minoritarian on Syrian diaspora identity, Anderson's constructivist account is integrated with the scholarship on nationalism that investigates the roots, including ethnic ones, of national identification. Shulze defines this process as the "invention of the People's nation". [504] In his opinion, four factors are significant to make a national feeling of belonging: religious, linguistic, historical and political unification.

In the *mahjar* translating into the "the host land", the combination of an individual's class background, confessional orientation, political sensibilities and identification with a national entity already in place for Syrian national identity is made more complex by loyalties to the host countries. In the study of national identity in diaspora, the concept of long-term nationalism is particularly useful for situating fluid and multi-layered diasporic attachments within a common framework.

Fahrenthold points out that long-distance nationalism comprises the manifestations of the link with the national homeland, be they emotional, cultural, social and political.[505] This has to do with a form of national belonging that consists of a:

> Claim to membership in a political community that stretches beyond the territorial borders of the homeland and generates an emotional attachment that is strong enough to compel people to political action that ranges from displaying a home country flag to deciding to return to fight and die in a land they may never have seen.[506]

The definition of long-distance national belonging provided by Shiller and Fouron

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[504] Schulze K. E, Stokes M., and Campbell, C. (eds.) (1996). *Nationalism, minorities and diasporas: identities and rights in the Middle East*. London; New York: I.B. Tauris, p. 159.
[505] Fahrenthold (2013), p. 18.
[506] Schiller, N. G. and Fouron, G. E. (2001). *Georges woke up laughing: Long-distance nationalism and the search for home*. Durham: Duke University Press, p. 4.

suits the attachment to Syria expressed by diasporans in Armenia and Australia in the previous chapter. In order to frame them in the field of nationalism, it is important to understand how national belonging is formed.

Billig uses Social Identity Theory to define "us" as a "national we".[507] People have to build their own national identity (in-group) in opposition to the others, them (out-group).[508] This requires forms of national identification that are dependent on group identity. Connecting the group with the nation, Kellas describes nationalism as "a form of political behaviour closely linked to ethnocentrism and patriotism".[509] Therefore, in his opinion the term "ethnocentrism" has a psychological meaning since it refers to "favourable attitudes" (in-group) and "unfavourable attitudes" (out-group).

Smith proposes an integrative approach towards the relationship between group and national identity in history.[510] He moderately refuses the idea of an "imagined" nation and its "modern" origin. In reporting Kohn's two ideological versions of nationalism, the "voluntarist" and the "organic" ideal[511] – the first one has to do with the possibility of the citizen choosing their nation of belonging, and the second one is about a fixed nationality as a matter of birth – he presents the "alternative" ethno-symbolic account. According to it, the nation has its origin in an ancient past (a "retrospective nationalism") and it is not simply a social construction. In the making of the modern nation, linguistic, cultural, ethnic, social, organic and voluntarist aspects are combined together.

Smith makes a distinction between the terms "ethnicity" and "nation": ethnicity recalls "ancestral myths" and "historical memories", while nation has its historical roots in its "historical territory". According to Smith, ethnicity and nationalism have to be studied as intertwined factors, since the concept of the nation contains ethnic elements that include: "memories, myths, values and traditions and in the institutionalized practices that derive from them".[512] In the search for a more integrative approach towards collective belonging in diaspora, Lacroix and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh claim:

[507] Billig, M. (1995). *Banal nationalism.* London; Thousand Oaks: Sage, p. 70. More on Social Identity Theory in Chapter 1 Introduction.
[508] More on Social Identity Theory in Chapters 1 and 2.
[509] Kellas, J. (1991). *The politics of nationalism and ethnicity.* Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, p. 4.
[510] Smith, A. (2001). "Will and sacrifice: images of national identity". *Millennium,* 30 (3), 571-582.
[511] See also Kohn (1976).
[512] Smith (2001), p. 576.

Indeed, a sense of belonging to a given community is nestled within a collective understanding of a common past, and collective memories can be defined as identity narratives which merge 'actual' and 'mythical' past events with the aim of inscribing the group in a historical and spatial trajectory. As such, collective memories delineate the 'when', the 'who' and the 'where' of the group as it is consolidated and reproduced over time and space.[513]

Following Smith's point of view, collective memories, myths and values are products of historic sedimentations that start from ethnic attachments and are helpful for the members' "self-understanding" of their identity. The identification of people in their nation derives from the appropriation of these ancestral shared values. In Smith's definition, nationalism is an advanced form of ethnic identification, from which it derives.

Gellner outlines a complete series of the components of nationalism. He tries to define the nation in terms of "will"[514], but it is not sufficient since "will" can be applied in every form of aggregation. At the same time, culture is not sufficient as well, because of its differentiations and its "invented" plurality. As a consequence, Gellner proposed his own method that consists in putting these two elements in relation to *polity*. Under these conditions, nations can be defined in terms of both will and culture, taking into account convergence of them both with the political realm. The fusion of will, culture and polity becomes the norm, not easily or frequently defied.[515] The nexus is, again, what Gramsci would call national-popular. Will has to do with the psychological and internal identification. Culture helps people to an external categorisation. Then, politics is the practical and social way of belonging to a nation.

Nationalism is not just a matter of birth or human nature. In the words of Kellas, "human nature provides the 'necessary' conditions of ethnocentric behaviour, but politics convert this into the 'sufficient conditions' for nationalism as we understand it today".[516] What derives is that nationalism can be defined as an ideology that is psychologically constructed by ethnicity, imaginatively identified by a shared culture and socially realised and maintained by politics. The next sections examine the way these rings of the chain are connected in the formation of Syrian nationalism.

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[513] Lacroix and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2013), p. 687.
[514] Gellner, E. (1983). *Nations and nationalism.* Oxford: Blackwell, p. 53.
[515] Gellner (1983), p. 55.
[516] Kellas, J. (1991). *The politics of nationalism and ethnicity.* Basingstoke: Macmillan Education.

5.4 Syrian "minority people"

The nexus composed of ethnicity, culture and politics is important for understanding the relation between "national people" and "minority people" that is at stake for the formation of Syrian nationalism. The category of minority is also extremely delicate in Syria, in a state where there are crosscutting religious and ethnic identities, as outlined in Chapter 4. Emerging after the formation of Syria as a nation-state, as White warns, the term has to be handed carefully, avoiding an "unreflective use of minority as an analytical category".[517]

Here minority is used as a category of practice, in particular focusing on how Syrian groups in exile give shape to the label. Syrian minority groups are internally and externally differentiated. Under religious labels like Sunni, Shia or Christian there are various sub-groups, which follow different branches of religion. As noted by Rosiny, Syrian Sunnis, for example have different ethnic compositions, territorial fragmentation (even within the cities of Damascus and Aleppo), and divergent political aspirations and religious beliefs.[518] The same is true for Syrian Christians.

Minority is defined as a "group distinguished by common ties of descent, physical appearance, language, culture and religion, in virtue of which they feel or are regarded as different from the majority of the population in a society".[519] Religion is the most important index of distinction in Syria, with Sunni Muslims constituting the majority (74%), followed by Shiites (Alawis and Ismailis making up 13%), and Christians (10%).[520] Since the groups are not well-defined blocks, this thesis is grounded in a fluid conception of minority, where the interaction of psychological, cultural, ethnic, religious and social factors is particularly evident. The nexus is also important for the evaluation of the relationship between minoritarian and national attachments.

Robert Gurr categorises communal groups with shared political interests, distinguishing between "national people" and "minority people".[521] National people are "regionally concentrated" and seek a "politically separated existence"; minority

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[517] White (2007).
[518] Rosiny (2013), p. 47.
[519] Brubaker (1995).
[520] Emadi (2011), p. 63. The recent and ongoing displacement is likely to have changed the religious composition of Syria in terms that are still undefined.
[521] Gurr, T. (2000). *Peoples versus states: Minorities at risk in the new century*. United States Institute of Peace Press, p. 15.

people share religious, ethnic, economic and social ties and aim to "protect or improve their status". [522] Gurr identifies two subtypes of national peoples: ethno-nationalists, who are regionally concentrated, share a history of political autonomy and very often have separatist objectives; and indigenous people, who are the "original inhabitants of a region" or a territory, and "have culture sharply distinct from the dominant groups". [523]

There are also three subtypes of minority people: ethno-classes, which are "ethnically or culturally" distinct people with special economic roles [524]; militant sects, "whose political status and activities are centred on the defense of their religious beliefs" [525]; and communal contenders, distinct groups that live in heterogeneous societies. Gurr observes that they live in states very often dominated by a powerful minority, whose ethno-politics ("a mix of concessions, co-optation and repression") leads to the formation of disadvantaged and advantaged groups. [526]

In the case of Syria, Gurr identifies the Alawi community of Syria as both a militant sect and an advantaged communal contender. When a minority becomes the ruling group, it has to face problems of "a lack of *prima facie* legitimacy", "naked coercion" and "group hierarchy". [527] It is important to emphasise that in Hafez al-Assad's rise to presidential power, the struggle also took place within the Alawi community. In particular, van Dam indicates the antagonism between "social transformationalists dominated by civilians" and the "nationalist trend", mostly composed of members of the army, promoting military and political cooperation. [528] Interestingly, van Dam refers to a "duality of power" ('*izdiwājiyyat al-sulta)* between power institutions and civic apparatus. [529] He also notes that when al-Assad was able to monopolise political power almost entirely in 1970 and become the president of Syria, the civilian section lost its power and was not able to regain it. [530] This happened after the corrective movement on 13 November 1970, when Hafez al-Assad appointed trusted members of the Alawi community to prominent posts in the

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[522] Gurr (2000), p. 16.
[523] Gurr (2000), p. 19.
[524] Gurr (2000), p. 18.
[525] Gurr (2000), p. 16.
[526] Gurr (2000), p. 22.
[527] Van den Berghe (1981), p. 67.
[528] Van Dam (1981), p. 85.
[529] Van Dam (1981), p. 86.
[530] Van Dam (1981), p. 88.

government.[531]

The divisions within groups make generalisations on Syrian minorities extremely difficult. Gurr does not mention Syrian minorities other than the Alawi. Kurds in Syria are easily classifiable as ethno-nationalist due to their separatist demands. Armenians could fit in the category of militant sects because of their desire to preserve their religious identity, but they could also be considered ethno-classes because of their cultural distinctiveness and economic role in the manufacturing sector in Syria.[532] Other groups, including Sunnis, could be communal contenders, but the borders of Gurr's categorisation are fluid if seen in the specific case of Syria. Sunni Syrians, for instance, might be considered both as numerically dominant (and so, as a majority) and politically outnumbered by the dominant.

The Syrian diasporans who participated in this study gave importance to the minority/majority as a politically significant issue in Syria. Their responses clearly show its complexity and the existence of liminal spaces between the categories used to classify minorities in Syria. This is important for the scope of the thesis, which focuses on the impact of identity issues, such as the majority/minority issue, on Syrian diasporic identity.

The political significance of the minoritarian issue is justified because participants referred to it in the definition of the Syrian regime. In particular, most of the participants in Armenia and Australia who identified themselves as Christian in the survey reported that the regime is "protective of minorities" as the most important definition representative of the Syria regime, as shown in Figure 7.

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[531] Emadi, (2011), p. 65.
[532] Migliorino (2012)

"Repressive of majority"	"Sectarian"	"Authoritarian"	"Secular and "protective of minorities"
• The least important for Syrian Armenians and more important for Syrian Australians (for 18% is the most important).	• Armenia: For 8% is the most important and for 10% is the least important; • Australia: For 11% is the most important and for 22% is the least important.	• Armenia: For 6% is the most important and for 6% is the least important; • Australia: For 20% is the most important or important and for 14% is the least important.	• The most important for nearly 30% (both)

Figure 7: Australian and Armenian case studies (combined): Definition of the Syrian regime

Note: 1=the most representative, 5=least representative. Options: A=Secular Party; B=Authoritarian; C=Secular and Authoritarian; D=Sectarian; E=Protective of Minorities; F=Repressive of the Majority; N=Neutral.

The figure is further discussed later in the chapters that focus on sectarianism and secularism. Here, only the definitions "protective of minorities", "repressive of the majority" and "authoritarian" are taken into account.

A great number of participants surveyed in Sydney and Melbourne attributed the greatest representativeness to the protection of minorities. The "repression of the majority" appears in a few cases as representative (2 on a scale of 5). One participant wrote a comment to his answer: "*Syria is a Muslim majority country and needs a government that represents the majority*".[533] Interestingly, the definition authoritarian has the most diverse scores, alone and associated with other definitions. The figure clearly conveys how diversely the matter is perceived. The classification was meant to be in no sense judgemental, so it does not necessarily suggest that the interviewees desire or agree on any of these political stances. In fact, when asked about the conditions for return to Syria, only three of the 37 Australian participants indicated the protection of minorities as a precondition.

In Armenia, the protection of minorities was unsurprisingly more popular amongst

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[533] Survey results, Participant 18, Sydney,

interviewees than in Australia. The majority of participants defined the actual regime as protective of minorities. It also represents the most suitable solution for the Syrian future according to many. This might also suggest that, despite Armenians of Syria being more appropriately defined as an ethnic group in Syria as clarified in Chapter 1, they find the minority category representative of their status. The presence of many political views is shown in Figure 8 below. The protection for minorities and secularism are significant points for Syrian Armenians, generally chosen together. The differentiation of the views on the regime emerges. The general and shared support for the protection of minorities does not imply common political interpretations. Unlike in Australia, where the definition "repressive of the majority" had some support from a few participants, Syrian Armenians did not find this category representative at all of the regime.

Conversely, like Syrians in Australia, Syrian Armenians disregarded the protection of minorities in the return question as a precondition for return to Syria. The return under the circumstance of a safe state is an important and popular response instead. Responding to the question "what does Syria need right now?", Syrians in Armenia used the following formula: "*al-aman, al-istiqrār, wa al-amān*" or "*wa al-salām*" translating into "security, stability, and safety" and "peace". The use of these three words by 12% of respondents in Yerevan is interesting and the repetition only occurs in the Armenian case study.

Security and safety alone are a form of *na^cama,* meaning "blessing" in Arabic, which might be one of the Ba'athist slogans at school.[534] The addition of *al-istiqrār,* translating into stability also in the sense of settlement, is consistent with the minoritarian nature of the Armenian community of Syria, where safety and security is a precondition for their protection and the possibility of living in Syria. As the previous chapter reports, Syrian Armenians who fled to Armenia declared that their movement was forced by the impossibility of staying in Syria after the uprising. By using a Bedouin derived formula, they convey the nomadic nature of their group.

The side comments that participants wrote on the survey questions, combined with the results of the interviews, on their representation of Syria and what being Syrian means can explain more about the relationship between minorities and nationality. The results of the influential case study with Syrian Armenians, an ethnic

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[534] Salamandra, C. (2013). "Sectarianism in Syria: Anthropological reflections." *Middle East Critique,* 22 (3), 303-306.

and religious group in Syria that was thought to be the most distant from a sense of belonging to Syria[535], are extremely explicative, which is why this section focuses on the influential case study. A background to the Armenians of Syria is helpful for evaluating the nature of the political protection of minorities in Syria in general and whether this impacts on Syrian national belonging.

5.5 Nationalism in the Armenians of Syria

In 1947, Albert Hourani claimed that Armenians and Kurds were "alien" at best and "hostile"[536] at worst to Syrian nationalism. The motives for Armenian identity preservation in Syria need to be historically contextualised rather than being simply explained as Armenian primordial separateness.[537] Armenian refugees who arrived in Syria in the 1920s after the 1915 Genocide were able to turn camps into settled and prosperous quarters by 1946.[538]

After the "turbulent 1950s"[539], Syrian Armenians remained in Syria and continued community building, initiated with their settlement in Aleppo and the northern regions of Syria.[540] A different interpretation of Syrian Armenian community building is provided by Payaslian, who considers Armenian subalternation[541] in Syria as the underlying cause for their latent propensity for non-assimilation. Payaslian derives the concept of subalternation from Gramsci as holding an "inferior status" and being subjected to the power of a social, economic, political and cultural hegemony.[542] According to Payaslian, the Syrian Armenian community, after the first settlement in Syria, remained in a state of re-diasporisation where the community "seeks to prevent assimilation by stressing primordial attachments to the homeland" and experiences a propensity towards "exit" or marginalisation.[543]

Armenian assimilation in Syria is seen as impossible in this case, because of the

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[535] Hourani, A. (1947). *Minorities in the Arab world.* London: Oxford University Press, p. 38.
[536] Hourani (1947).
[537] White, B. (2007). "The nation-state form and the emergence of 'minorities' in Syria." *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism,* 7 (1), 64-85. p. 74.
[538] White, B. (2017). "Refugees and the definition of Syria, 1920–1939." *Past and Present,* 235 (1), 141-78, p. 175.
[539] Migliorino (2012), p. 18.
[540] White (2017), p. 145.
[541] Payaslian, S. (2007). "Diasporan subalternities: The Armenian community in Syria." *Diaspora,* 16(1-2), 92-132, p. 97.
[542] Payaslian (2007), p. 98.
[543] Payaslian (2007), p. 96.

hostility of the host society towards Armenian integration in its social, political and cultural life.[544] The number of Armenians who remained in Syria creating "the largest Armenian centre in the Arab World"[545] is commonly described as an attempt to construct a little Armenia in Syria, an isolated and separate Armenian identity.[546] However, cultural distinctiveness is not always associated with primordial separateness and lack of integration. Integration without assimilation is a working model in the Middle East and Syria, especially useful for understanding the Syrian Armenian community.[547] Preservation of Armenian identity is a moral imperative shaped by the Genocide and formed around church, family and the teaching of the Armenian language. [548] Non-assimilation and community construction do not necessarily imply primordial hostility towards the Syrian state. Instead, loyalty to Syria is a constant feature of Armenians as a "coherent" community in Syria.[549]

Between the late 1960s and 2011, Syrian Armenians found a *modus vivendi* in Syria.[550] The reconciliation between the Armenian community and Syrian institutions included forms of mutual political neutrality. The Syrian Armenian community was allowed to have its own schools and cultural organisations to maintain its cultural identity, strictly at civil society level, and autonomy was granted to religious organisations "on condition that oppositional activity is eschewed".[551] As Migliorino explains, since 1973 the Armenian community has been allowed to nominate one representative in the parliament who is elected where the community is larger, in Aleppo (other Armenians sit in the City Council). [552] Migliorino notes that the representative cannot speak or act on behalf of specific ethnic groups, but has appeared to be willing to ensure that the community is represented within that institution.[553]

Salamandra points out that security is directly linked to religious protection in Syria, given that the regime's security apparatus exercises direct control on religious

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[544] Payaslian (2007), p. 98.

[545] Hovannisian (1974), p. 28.

[546] Migliorino (2012), p. 18.

[547] Chatty, D. (2010). *Displacement and dispossession in the modern Middle East*. The Contemporary Middle East Series. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 32.

[548] Chatty (2010), p. 145.

[549] Chatty (2010), p. 139.

[550] Migliorino (2016), p. 26.

[551] Hinnebusch, R. A. (1995). "The political economy of economic liberalization in Syria". *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* 27 (3), 305-20, p. 324. More on this in the Chapter 7.

[552] Migliorino (2012), p. 28.

[553] Migliorino (2012), p. 29.

groups. [554] Control is the price to pay for protection. Protection of minorities is a peculiar form of restricted freedom, where association and cultural preservation is allowed, but political activism remains strictly unauthorised. [555]

Autonomy, especially in education, stability and security is accorded to Armenians because they are a "politically trusted community". [556] Compliance with the regime is instrumental for integration. Armenians are politically associable with other Christian groups, which, as Bandak observes in circumstances like the Christmas annual concerts, express "if not outright cordiality, then at least pragmatic accommodation between the regime and a significant contingent of Syrian Christians". [557] Events like those analysed by Bandak are the places where official nationalism, to use Anderson's term, is at stake and the image of Arab unity and inclusion of all religious groups was portrayed. In Bandak's view, this does not correspond to an uncritical compliance with the regime's nationalist narrative by Syrian Christians, but it rather is an occasion for them to be central in the nation: "The importance of an event such as the Christmas concert here is that a space for the minority is allowed and used in the centre of the nation". [558] This process is defined as a dual accommodation: instrumental for Christians to depict them as a consistent part of the nation and useful for the regime for creating popularity and patriotism. [559]

Due to such mutual, pragmatic and implicit agreement, over time, political representations of the Armenian community in Syria have transformed from "a threat to the independence and the Arabness of the nation" dominant amongst Syrian nationalists in 1932–1946 to "a national inspiration for agency" after the 1960s. [560] Unlike the Kurds, Armenians have never developed internal secessionist claims in Syria. [561] Armenian political parties in Syria remained generally disinterested in Syrian domestic matters outside community politics and, devoted to Armenian nationalism, never questioned their "sincere loyalty and gratitude" for Syria and its institutions that accommodated the demands of the Armenian community. [562]

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[554] Salamandra, C. (ed.) (2015). *Syria from reform to revolt: Volume 2: Culture, society, and religion.* Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, p. 11. More on religious associations in Syria in Chapter 5.
[555] Migliorino (2012), p. 26.
[556] Hinnebusch (1995), p. 26.
[557] Bandak in Salamandra (2015), p. 111.
[558] Bandak in Salamandra (2015), p. 114.
[559] Bandak in Salamandra (2015).
[560] White (2017), p. 175. Motherland and fatherland are used interchangeably as synonymous.
[561] Altug (2011), p. 83.
[562] Migliorino (2012), p. 28.

The two elements of involvement and integration in the Syrian private sector and preservation of Armenian identity in the private sphere have led to the construction of a Syrian Armenian identity, which widely describes the Syrian Armenian community of Aleppo as the "motherland". [563] Cultural distinctiveness and resistance to assimilation remain but have not prevented the construction of Syria as a "*second fatherland*"[564] for Armenians.[565] Syria could not be the first fatherland (or motherland) because of the moral imperative to preserve the attachment to the "imagined Armenian homeland"[566] rather than because of perception of subalternation.

Despite the literature on Armenian marginalisation in Syria, Syrian Armenians' self-perception tells a story of Syrian identity building. Thanks to "the organized inter-community institutional structure that allows them to maintain their national roots", Syrian Armenians are perceived by Armenian elites as "fully integrated in the host country".[567] The historic Armenian community in Syria is also described in the politics of Armenians as 'the continuation of the country [Armenia]'.[568] Hence, it should not be automatically assumed that Syrian Armenians are averse to a collective attachment to Syria.

Syrian Armenians in Armenia identifying themselves as Syrian first confirm their loyalty to the Syrian nation.[569] The responses of participants in Armenia, when combined together, convey the formation of Syrian national feelings at its best:

> *Nationality and citizenship are not always identical. The importance of ethnicity is diminishing because it is linked to the idea of the tribe. We do not say ethnic in Armenia, but we have one of the strongest identity problems: we are screaming about our nationality, but nationality does not belong to us. Syria is a home for Syrian Armenians, and they feel strong about their nationality. Elsewhere, they feel like pilgrims.[570]*

Syrian Armenians are also an exemplar case of the non-obstructive relationship

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[563] Syria's Armenians look to ancient homeland for safety, BBC, 10 September 2015, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34210854 (accessed 10 October 2015)

[564] Motherland and fatherland are used interchangeably.

[565] White (2017), p. 172, his emphasis. White refers to the definition used by Muhammad Kurd Ali in 'The topography of Syria'.

[566] Chatty (2010), p. 32.

[567] Gasparyan (2016), p. 212.

[568] Gasparyan (2016), p. 217.

[569] See also the documentary: 'From the Lands: special Episode on Armenians' [in Arabic], 48 min., 34 sec., April 24, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0tdNGI43A0Q (accessed 6 October 2015).

[570] Interview with UNHRC representative in Armenia (Yerevan).

between ethnic identity and nationality. All the Syrian Armenian participants expressed attachment to Syria conveyed by the expressions: "*Syria was a mosaic supporting each other. Syrians are first Syrians, second comes ethnic and religious affiliation*".[571] A young employee at the museum of Yerevan said: "*Syria is my country. I am trying to maintain my Syrian identity throughout language and translation. I would like to continue my studies in a foreign country*". A Syrian Armenian housewife in her fifties said: "*Syria is my love*". A student who also runs a shop of Syrian sweet in Yerevan said: "*I would like to go back to Syria because I love my country and I love my state that in the future will be a strong and human state*". A young Syrian Armenian writer is less optimistic about the future, but still attached to Syria:

> *It is impossible to talk about freedom in Syria now and in the recent future.*
> *However, I cannot deny or disclaim my Syrian identity. Both the Syrian and*
> *the Armenian identity influence my semi-autobiographical writings. I*
> *follow the events in Syria; Syria is part of my life.*

The strength of Syrian identity amongst Armenians of Syria is also evident in the survey responses on the question of nationality and identity scale: the majority identified nationality as Syrians (64%), with the remaining as Syrian Armenians (32%) and only 2 respondents as Armenians (4%). The responses reflect the information provided by local Syrian NGOs in Armenia, with roughly one third of Syrian Armenians applying for Armenian citizenship. While Syrian nationality prevails, Armenian is the language more widely spoken (73%) at home. Almost all the participants could also speak fluent Arabic and/or Syrian dialect.

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[571] Interview with the president of a Syrian Armenian NGO (Yerevan).
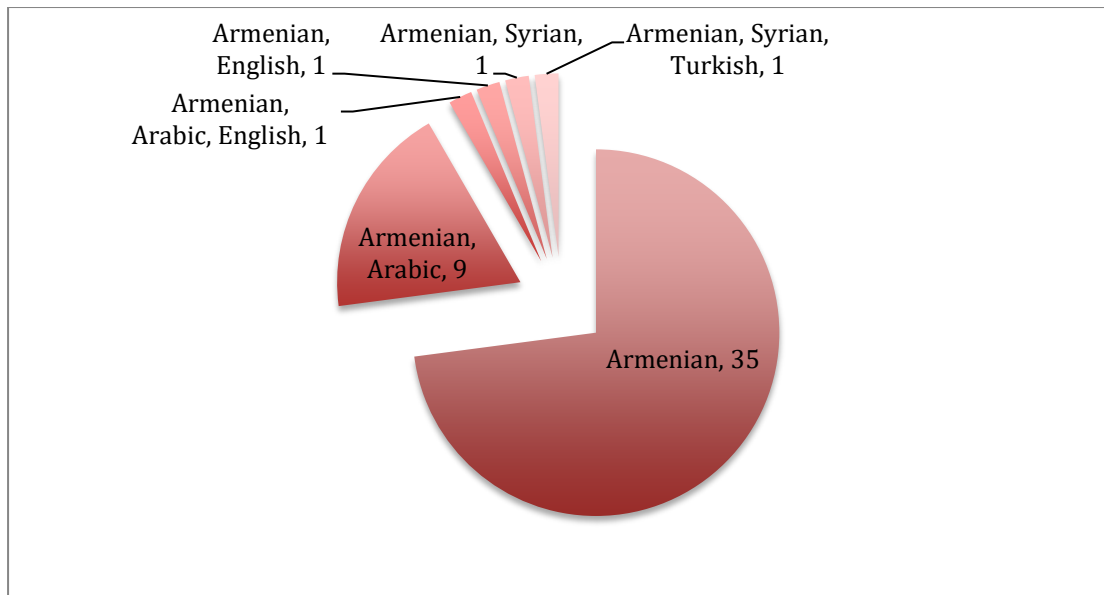
Figure 8: Armenian case study: Language spoken at home

Note: Sample size of 48 (small sections = 1 person).

When asked to put their identity on a scale of importance, most participants could not declare a preference of Syrian, Armenian or Christian identity over one another. Figure 9 shows the difficulty of putting identity affiliations on a scale of preference.
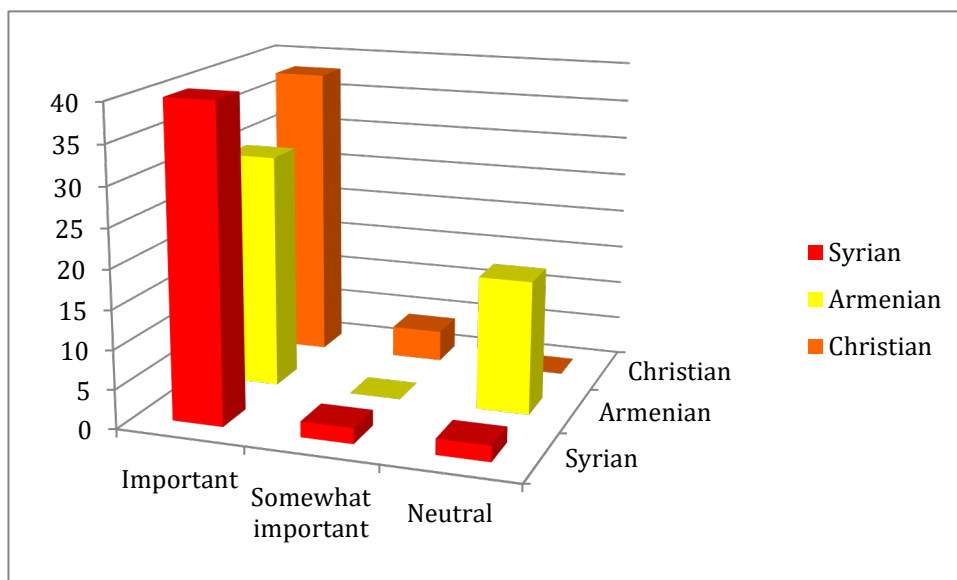
Figure 9: Armenian case study: Importance of national identity

Note: Sample size of 48.

The most popular response, 40% of respondents, was Syrian, Christian and Armenian with the same importance. Another popular option, 34%, was Syrian and Christian

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equivalent and Armenian with a neutral scale. This shows the existence of multi-identities rather than hierarchies of identity, as noticed in the hypothesis and in Chapter 4. In the case of different scales of identity affiliation, the Syrian identity prevails over the Armenian identity, with 34% of participants giving the top score of 1 to Syrian and Christian and neutral (3) to the Armenian identity or, much more rarely, the Christian identity prevails.

5.6 Arabism in the crafting of Syrian nationalism

The imposition of a common Arab identity has been the core interest of Syrian politics as a way to deal with such a religiously and ethnically diverse population. In the Syrian political realm, the nationalist question remained closely connected to the minority/majority issue. Arabism, with its claim to create a common identity where different religions and groups could feel included[572], is an instrument of the Syrian state for driving national identification and shaping official nationalism. The historical excursus of the following paragraphs shows the political and ideological nature of the pan-Arab discourse in modern Syria. Pan-Arabism, as the major component of *al-nahḍa* 'Arab renaissance' in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, has always been a constant since the very first transition from the Ottoman rule to the creation of the nations of Syria (see Chapter 1), Lebanon and Egypt.

In Ottoman Syria, Syrian Arab nationalism was formulated in direct contrast to Turkish domination. Syrian Arab identity was also thought by some intellectuals as a possible replacement for those bonds and as a new common index for different ethnic and religious communities. The work of Farah Antun and Butrus al-Bustani, among others, is explanatory. The two thinkers who belonged to the Christian Orthodox minorities in Syria during the *nahḍa*[573] wished for "unity" of Syria and argued against religious fragmentation in society. In their opinion, national Syrian identity had to replace and erase religious differences. In his novel *The New Jerusalem*[574], Antun considers the three major monotheistic religions in Jerusalem by highlighting their common factors. In particular, his novel describes how Christianity and Islam could forget their differences by sharing their substantial link with socialism (*'ishtirākiyya*)

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[572] Salamandra (2013), p. 303.
[573] Also known as Arab Renaissance at the end of the nineteenth century.
[574] Antun, F. (1904). *'Ūrushlīl al-jadīda* [in Arabic]. Hindawi.

and Arabism.[575]

Al-Bustani proposes Arab patriotism and nationalism to eliminate religious tensions in Syria. In his view, in order to restore "inter-religious concord", the rulers have to distance themselves from the religious dimension, and embrace the religion of Arabism. In his view, patriotic and national solidarity should replace religious solidarity:

> Religious solidarity, he forcefully wrote, drove us to disaster and distress, planting weakness and discord among us, because instead of one sect there were twelve, each one trying to promote its own interests and trample on the interests of the others. The result was retardation and ruin. But this was the heritage of the past, the outcome of the policy of the past, based as it had been on religious solidarity. The world today is constituted on national *(jinsiyya)* and patriotic *(wataniyya)* solidarity.[576]

Al-Bustani's work well represents Arabism as a possible solution to religion tensions that occurred in the mid and late nineteenth century. To this, common political demands to the Ottoman rule should be added.

In the major cities of Syria, members of different religious groups, Christians, Druses and Muslims, started to advance their claims for fundamental Arab rights against the Ottomans.[577] The Brotherhood Society was formed around Arab demands and opposed the Turkification of Syria.[578] The first Arab government over Syria that took place soon after the end of the First World War had societal "unity among people of all sects, religions and nationalities"[579] as a top priority. It resulted from the Arab movement in 1918 after the Emir Faysal ibn Husein, head of the Arab government, had made contact with Arab political and cultural societies based in Syria and Palestine and recruited members of the most important of these societies, al-Fatat and Arab club.[580] The government, in alliance with the elites and the intellectual class of Syrians, used Arabism to shape national identity. However, as Gelvin notes, the Arabist rule was unpopular because of its elitist composition and was opposed by other nationalist groups that proposed a different version of Arabism, according to which:

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[575] Antun (1904), p. 68.
[576] Al-Bustani, p. 18.
[577] Tibawi, (1969), p. 163.
[578] Tibawi, (1969), p. 202.
[579] Tibawi, (1969), p. 163.
[579] Tibawi, (1969), p. 226.
[580] Gelvin, J. (1994). "Demonstrating communities in post-Ottoman Syria". *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History,* 25 (1), 23-44, p. 24.

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> Syria was not merely a collection of semi autonomous communities, but was rather a historically determined and fully integrated community that transcended the "primordial" cleavages among its population. Syrians participated in communal life as members of interdependent estates (tabaqat), which were connected through horizontal ties of mutual obligation.[581]

According to Gelvin, the Arab government was "unable to instill its brand of nationalist ideology among the Syrian population" because it did not resonate with that of the population. In response to this disjuncture, other nationalist groups that Gelvin calls populist because populist committees of different neighbourhoods constituted them demonstrated against the Arab government and claimed to represent the "will of the Nation".[582] As Gelvin concludes, the post-Ottoman Arab nationalism was far from being homogeneous politically and ideologically. Arabism was crafted to respond to the presence of different religious and ethnic minorities in Syria and, as a consequence, diverse attachments that could be kept together by the loyalty to the Arab nation.[583] Neither the Arab government nor the other groups could prevent the imposition of the French rule and the administrative division of Syria.

The second Arab government resulted from the resistance against the French rule of Syria.[584] The period between 1936 and 1939 represented an exception to the divisive rule, with the autonomous districts incorporated in the administration of the newly emerged National Bloc.[585] Different minorities, including Kurdish, Armenian, Assyrian and Catholic leaders,[586] joined the National Bloc in 1936, united by the resistance against the French rule. However, as Khoury points out, the Bloc failed to "erode the sub-national loyalties".[587] Such a strategy included the obscuration and de-politicisation of ethno-religious differences, which, in Altug's view, was unsuccessful to manage sectarian tensions and to create an inclusive Syrian national identity.[588] After the independence of Syria from colonial rule, there was a switch from the pro-Christian sentiments of the French rule to the idea of a Sunni majority revival

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[581] Gelvin (1994), p. 29.
[582] Gelvin (1994), p. 40.
[583] Gelvin (1994).
[584] Gelvin (1994).
[585] Fildis, A. (2012). "Roots of Alawite-Sunni rivalry in Syria." *Middle East Policy, 19*(2), 148-156, p. 148. The path towards a nationalist Bloc was not without incongruences. Altug speaks of "factionalism" in the first movements for independence in Syria, made of three separate groups: (the pan-Arab and secular) *Istiqlālī* ('Independentist'), the "People's party" willing to collaborate with the British Empire, and the Islamic movement supported by Saudi Arabia.[585] The three groups converged to the National Bloc. Altug (2011), p. 182.
[586] Altug (2011), p. 252.
[587] Khoury (1987), p. 267.
[588] Altug (2011), p. 252.

underneath the nationalist program.[589] The National Bloc created a series of political labels to subvert the minority card used by the French power: protection of minority became synonymous with loss of sovereignty, anti-nationalism, regionalism, and continuation of colonial rule. [590]

The process towards the creation of an inclusive Syrian national identity was driven by the need to address the complex question of religion.[591] Khoury's assertions on nationalist leadership are of interest:

> Nationalist leaders, themselves, continued to be attached to mixed and often conflicting loyalties. Depending on his particular set of circumstances, a nationalist's loyalty might be first to his town before the state or to Islam before Arabism.[592]

In the crafting of Syrian nationalism, nationalist leaders were part of a particular class of Syrians that proposed a reformed system that would have undermined the power and privilege of the elites that were part of the French colonial system, but reinforced another set of privileges. Wien explains the elitist composition of Syrian leadership after independence:

> In Syria, the old elites safeguarded their inherited control over Syrian society by endorsing Arab nationalism, without offering room for any change in patterns of social stratification. Urban notables transformed themselves into a national bourgeoisie, maintaining their paternalistic hegemony over society through existing patron–client networks.[593]

The failure of eradicating social structural differences, in particular between urban-based elites and rural-based leadership[594] had its basis in the maintenance of pre-existing loyalties.

Arabism, once again, seemed the solution for a more inclusive national identity. Altug explains that the post-independence regimes aimed to de-politicise the religious and ethnic differences, trying to curb them from both the political and the cultural point of view.[595] The pan-Arab ideology was considered the main tool to achieve such an objective. This switch from the French policy tending to exploit minoritarian

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[589] Altug (2011), p. 245.
[590] Altug (2011).
[591] Altug (2011), p. 247.
[592] Altug (2011), p. 247.
[593] Wien, P. (2011). "The long and intricate funeral of Yasin Al-Hashimi: Pan-Arabism, civil religion, and popular nationalism in Damascus, 1937". *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* 43 (2), 271-292, p. 274.
[594] Fildis (2012), p. 150.
[595] Altug (2011), p. 84.

identities[596] to one around Arab national identity was a radical response to a period of severe political instability that is comparable to the ongoing crisis in Syria.

As Sadowski notes, in the new political climate after independence, the prospect was anarchy and there were doubts on the future of Syria as an integral country. [597] After a detailed historiographical analysis, Mufti concludes that the years between 1954 and 1967 were characterised by profound political instability, a praetorian phase in which violent military coups, characterised by "non-stopping jockeying for power were constant on the political agenda".[598] This was aggravated by an economic crisis and by political and military indecision on what course to follow, particularly on the project of Arab unity. [599] Post-colonial instability plays an important role in the definition of the national question.

The newly formed Syrian state had many challenges turning itself from an artificial state resulting from the collapse of the French colonial power into an independent and solid nation-state. Nikolaos van Dam argues that when Syria became independent in 1946 it was "a state without being a nation-state, a political entity without being a political community".[600] In that period, pan-Arab nationalism was emerging as a major ideological tool for nation building. Various, not always coherent, attempts of union with Iraq and Egypt culminating in the United Arab Republic experiment, under the ideological umbrella of pan-Arabism, were seen as the instruments to achieve and maintain an unstable power gained by the rulers through military coups. [601]

To use Mufti's image, the political elite sought from outside what was missing at home: legitimation and stability. [602] As both Kienle and Mufti notice, Arab nationalism was ambiguous, with an interchangeable use and no neat distinction between Syrian nationalism and patriotism and Arab nationalism, even in school curricula.[603] The bitter irony of the circumstance is well expressed by Kienle: the

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[596] Altug (2011). During the French mandate, the *divide et impera* strategies included the division of autonomous districts to exploit ethno-religious minorities including the Alawi. On this see also Farouk-Alli, A. (2014).
[597] Sadowski (1987), p. 252.
[598] Sadowski (1987), p. 265.
[599] Tibawi (1969), p 384.
[600] Van Dam (1981), p. 19.
[601] Mufti, A. R. (2004). "Critical Secularism: a reintroduction for perilous times." *Boundary 2",* 31(02), pp. 1-9, p. 6.
[602] Sadowski (1987), p. 268.
[603] Mufti (2004).

United Arab Republic was "brought about by Syrians and not done by Syrians".[604] It was proposed by the Ba'ath party as a fulfilment of the pan-Arab ideology and as a response to external political conditions[605], but it turned out as the non-coincidence between the state and the imagined community in Syria.[606] There was very little popular internal support for the union.

The year 1963 was seen as the beginning of the twilight for pan-Arab unionist projects due to the emergence of the Ba'ath Party.[607] As Kienle also notes, after the experience of the United Arab Republic, Syria was more reluctant to unify with other Arab countries, not only because of the failure of the Republic, but more importantly because of a redefinition of the Syrian political and social community.[608] The defeat by Israel and the loss of the Golan Heights in 1967 also played an important role in the reconstruction of the Arabist discourse. Despite being forced to sign a ceasefire agreement with Israel in 1973, Syria remained in a state of cold war with Israel and continued to denounce the Israeli occupations of Arab lands.[609] Pan-Arabism was still an important ideology, but it was adopted in a different way and for different purposes. The consolidation of the Ba'ath Party redefined the ideology of pan-Arabism in more nationalist terms.

As Hinnebusch points out, when Hafez al-Assad came to power in 1970, Syria could no longer afford internal struggles.[610] This implied a change in identity politics, in order to pursue what Hinnebusch defines as one of al-Assad's main objectives: national unity.[611] Arabism was the key at that point: "Any religious or communal manifestation has to be absent from the public spaces that are central in the construction of national Arab identity".[612] As Kienle also notes, Arabism was mitigated, but still present.[613] It was infused by a more important but still vague Syrian nationalism and Greater Syrian nationalism. To use Mufti's words, Arabism

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[604] Kienle, E. (1995). "Arab unity schemes revisited: Interest, identity, and policy in Syria and Egypt." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 27 (1), 53-71, p. 56.
[605] Briefly, as a response to the Suez crisis and as an alliance against Israel.
[606] Kienle (1995), p. 55.
[607] Kienle (1995).
[608] Kienle (1995), p. 58.
[609] Emadi (2012), p. 65.
[610] Hinnebusch (1995), p. 35.
[611] Hinnebusch (1995).
[612] Hinnebusch (1995).
[613] Kienle (1995), p. 61.

was an "almost ritualistic exercise" to respond to domestic crises.[614]

It is also worthwhile noting that pan-Arab nationalism was perceived as a panacea for the problems associated with the leadership of the Alawi minority. From the literature on ethno-politics in Chapter 3 it can be asserted that minoritarian regimes have legitimation issues that are often addressed through explicit politics of identity.[615] As Haklai suggests applying ethno-politics theories to the Syrian regime, the political legitimation includes identity policies aiming to blur the differences between majority and minority and to downplay ethnic distinctions through the nationalist card.[616] Al-Assad's politics make no exception generally speaking, but the nationalist card is a combination of pan-Arab, pan-Syrian and Syrian nationalism.

From the political point of view, the al-Assad regime has reproposed the cultural extensive ideology of obscuring sub-identities in the name of a common Arab identity in its political program in a different way from that of previous pan-Arab experiences. Ajami's comments on Hafez al-Assad are of interest:

> A cautious member of a minority sect, he harbors no illusions about Arab unity and is probably the first leader in modern Syrian history to make peace with Syria's national situation and to accept the limitations of geography and resources. [617]

Notwithstanding a geographic realism towards the Arab question, Hafez al-Assad treated pan-Arabism in an ambiguous way, since he used it as a sporadic political instrument for legitimising his regime, which is the reason for the lack of a real political national discourse in Syria. As Malik Mufti observes, pan-Arabism was used by the Syrian regime as "defensive unity" in periods of weak legitimacy, but was not a "popular ideological objective in its own right". [618] This is an important indicator of the disjunction between the national and the popular. Pan-Arabism is associated with historical militarism and nationalist slogans also in Syrian school curricula, following a pedagogical system that was put in place in Syria over the course of the 20th century.

In a very recent study, Phillips highlights the ambiguity of the al-Assads in the political construction of Syrian identity in the passage from Hafez al-Assad's to Bashar al-Assad's presidency. In his view, the "sub-state ties" in Syria remained

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[614] Kienle (1995).
[615] Haklai (2000), p. 23.
[616] Haklai (2000), p. 26.
[617] Haklai (2000), p. 23.
[618] Mufti (2004).

substantially "undefined".[619] Hafez al-Assad's rule, he claims, "highlighted different facets of Syria's history and culture according to changing priorities: Arab nationalism against Israel, Greater Syrian identity to justify military intervention in Lebanon, and Islam after the failed Muslim Brotherhood uprising".[620] *Mutatis mutandis,* this is re-occurring in the current Syrian conflict, since Bashar al-Assad promoted pan-Arabism before the uprising of 2011, and after that, has often focused on politicised sectarian identity. Phillips' words on this kind of lineage are of interest:

> However, Assad's decade in power continued the trend established by his father of ostensibly denying sectarian differences while reinforcing their political importance as a means to maintain power. Perceived economic advantages for Alawis and a reliance on an Alawi power base increased, while a regime-permitted conservative Sunni Islam and a growing regional sectarian discourse produced an environment in which Syrians were frequently reminded of sectarian identity, albeit alongside a Syrian one.[621]

The controversial nature of al-Assad's politicisation of identity is evident in the negation of sectarian differences, which is fulfilled through the pan-Arab discourse, on the one hand; and the reminder of sectarian identity, especially stressed after the uprising to maintain the support of Syrian minorities. In such a political dimension, Syrian national identity is only a subordinate corollary.

Other scholars have underlined the ambiguity of the Syrian regime when dealing with Syrian identity. Pipes has described it as "the dangerous double game": to think as an Alawi, on the one hand; and to think as a pan-Arab, on the other.[622] His claim is correct in identifying the rigid conception of Syrian political identity as composed of sub-national and super-national identities. What is misleading in Pipes' theory is his justification of the use of pan-Arabism to conceal al-Assad's primary interest of pan-Syrianism, the dream to unify the Greater Syria.[623]

Arabism and Syrianism have the same historical roots in the period of post-First World War Ottoman instability when the Ottoman rule was conceived as "untenable" in Syria (between 1918 and 1920).[624] As Fahrenthold explains, "Syrianism emerged as an inchoate but powerful movement against continued Ottoman rule in Syria, with

[619] Phillips (2015), p. 371.
[620] Phillips (2015).
[621] Phillips (2015), p. 368.
[622] Pipes (1990).
[623] Commonly described as spanning from the Taurus Mountains to the Suez isthmus, and from the Euphrates River to the Mediterranean Sea.
[624] Fahrenthold (2013), p. 29.

an attendant desire to preserve greater Syria's territorial integrity".[625] Al-Assad re-invented it as a political justification for the continued territorial claims of the Golan Heights, occupied by Israel after the six-day war in 1967.

Furthermore, the use of Arabism and Syrianism is not separated from sub-national loyalties, as Pipes and Phillips could think. On the contrary, it is linked to the minority rule, and, consequently, to the sub-national dimension, since it is an instrument for underplaying the Muslim identity of the majority. As Haklai suggests, the pan-Arab ideology is one of the instruments for the legitimation and the power maintenance of the minority rule.[626] He explains that, because of the Alawis' first attempts to secede from Syria during the fight for independence, it would have been "unreasonable" to present themselves as Syrians and "it made more sense for the Alawi regime through the idea that all Arabs were members of one nation".[627]

The focus of the regime on the Arab identity is useful to put Muslim identity in a secondary position and to say to the Syrian people something like: "we are all Arabs before being Muslims". In fact, even though Bashar al-Assad has declared himself to be "simply Muslim", his Muslim identity is not without complications. The Alawi is a contested sect of Shia in Islam, and there is no consensus on whether it can be accepted as Muslim or not. The famous fourteenth-century Syrian Sunni jurist Ibn Taymiyya, the principal authority for modern Salafi Islamists, declared the Alawis "unbelievers" in a series of fatwas. [628] To respond to this kind of criticism from the Islamist fringe that considered him an atheist, Bashar al-Assad participated in public prayers and religious ceremonies and used his authority to compel the mufti of Damascus to declare him a devout Muslim.[629] Since the legitimation of the Syrian regime as Muslim remained complicated, it was better to identify it in religiously neutral terms as Arab.

In his analysis of Bashar al-Assad's speeches in 2011, Phillips notes that the Arab identity is the "most pronounced" and that Bashar al-Assad referred to Syrian people as "Arab Syrians".[630] The justification for that, in Phillip's view, is to create a sense of

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[625] Fahrenthold (2013).
[626] Haklai (2000), p. 36.
[627] Haklai (2000), p. 36.
[628] Haklai (2000).
[629] Emadi, (2012), p. 64.
[630] Phillips (2013), p. 60.

"superiority" in Syrian nationalism and in Syrian people as "the most Arab"[631] in the Arab world. After 2011, with the current conflict, Syria has witnessed a switch from ideologised pan-Arabism to politicised sectarianism, discussed in the next chapter.

Khaldoun Khashanah provides useful information on the most recent Syrian events and on the status of these political ideologies before and after the Syrian conflict in 2011.[632] In particular, while in the pre-conflict period Arab nationalism was largely predominant, a shift post-crisis saw Arab nationalism going from the most relevant to the least.[633] On the contrary, post-crisis, sectarianism and Islamism became predominant at the expense of Arab nationalism, transformed from the most relevant to the least relevant. The importance of Syrian nationalism and sub-nationalism has remained the same, always very little.[634] From the comparison between pre- and post-crisis, it is possible to make two deductions: the religious dimension (sectarian or political Islamic) has emerged only recently in Syria, as it is clear in the next two chapters, and Syrian nationalism has never been a determining tool in Syrian political discourse. In such strategy, what is missing is Syrian nationalism.

5.7 The Syrian "national popular"

In spite of the absence of a coherent national discourse, Syrians outside Syria are developing their own nationalism. In the analysis of Syrian Armenians' survey responses, words related to "violence", "fighting" and hostilities" are less frequent than words in the sematic sphere of affection. Love and its word constructions such as beloved or loving are used more than war and violence.[635] Both *Syria is my fatherland* and *Syria is my motherland* expressions are used interchangeably in the Armenian influential case study, as shown also in the previous chapter.

Accordingly, in the definitions of Syria as a state during the war, a vast majority of respondents picked "a nation", while they defined Syria before the war as "a strong state". The combination of such responses represents the conservation of the national feeling after 2011. However, the change in the definition is likely to imply that the conflict in 2011 produced an alteration in the way Syrian Armenians perceive Syria.

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[631] Phillips (2013).

[632] Khashanah, K. (2014). "The Syrian crisis: A systemic framework". *Contemporary Arab Affairs,* 7 (1), 1-21, p. 13.

[633] Khashanah (2014), p. 14.

[634] Khashanah (2014).

[635] Love is used 1.10%. War and violence are less used at 0.5% each in the open-ended questions.

In fact, in the comments, respondents used "before we used to trust each other", so trust is linked to the presence of a strong state. The term "nation" was used by participants, in response to the questions on what was Syria before the conflict and what is Syria now.

In the survey of Syrians in Australia, the majority defined Syria as a "strong state" before the conflict, as shown in Figure 10.
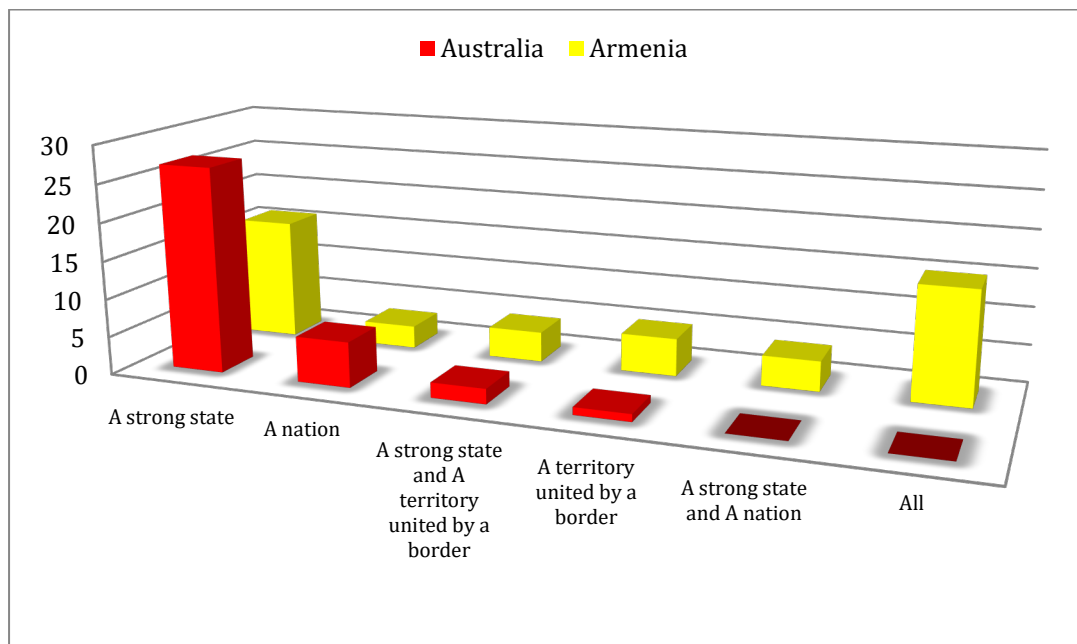
Figure 10: Australian and Armenian case studies (combined): What was Syria before the conflict

Note: Sample size of 37 and 48.

Responses for after the war were different, as shown in Figure 11.
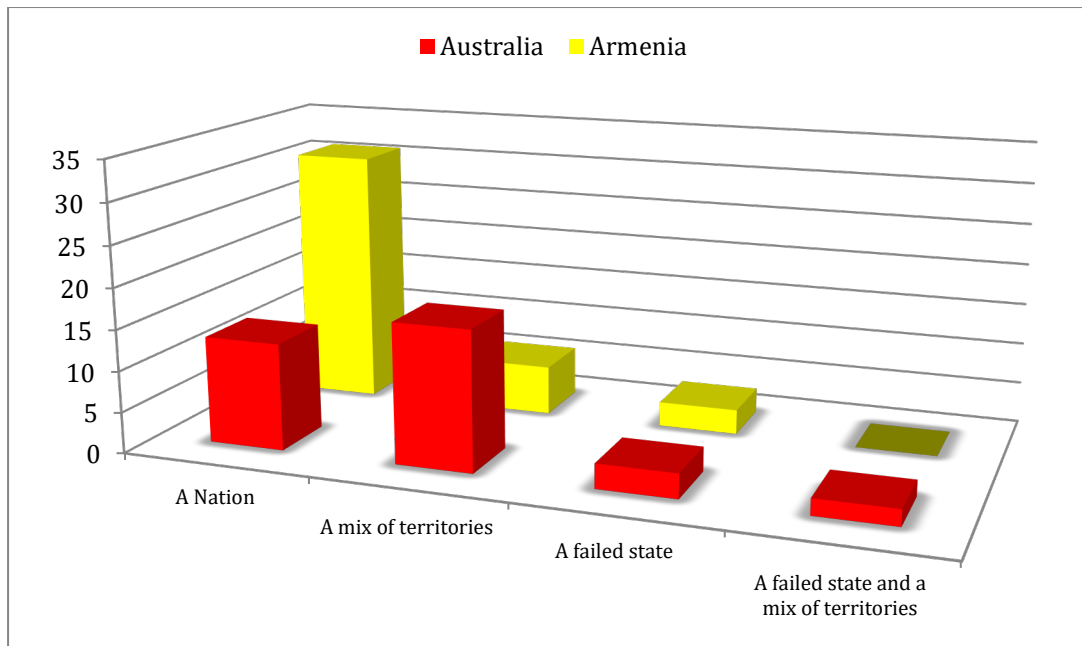
Figure 11: Australian and Armenian case studies (combined): What is Syria after the war

Note: Sample size of 37 and 48.

Interestingly, the term "nation" has a higher degree of representativeness after the conflict rather than before. A minority decided that Syria is "a failed state", while half of participants thought that Syria is a "mix of territories". In a note, a participant suggested: *"a mix of Syrian people"*. The strength of the state before the war is now outweighed by these responses that suggest a decline of the state power after the conflict. The attractiveness of the option "a mix of territories" suggests that the conflict has caused an alteration of the perceptions of the borders created with the Skye-Picot agreement. Overall, feeling towards Syria as a nation has increased after the conflict.

As Yahya Sadowski points out, Syrian nationalism is a popular "sentiment", but it has not been developed as an ideology by an intellectual articulation and a political program. [636] The gap between the national and the popular emerges with all consequences theorised by Gramsci: lack of participation of masses into political life, highly ideologised nationalism and absence of a national collective will. During fieldwork, a significant number of eligible participants in both Australia and Armenia declined to participate due to the presence of political questions in the survey. The justification was: "I do not know much or I do not care about politics". After forty

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[636] Shulze (2002), p. 148.

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years of prohibition of the critique of the regime in public and of authoritarian rule[637], the unwillingness to address political questions is not surprising and is about self-preservation. In particular, about 10% of Syrian Armenians in Armenia who agreed to participate decided not to respond to the political questions in Figures 10 and 11 above. This is likely because the Armenians of Syria remained distant from Syrian political life, as clarified in the previous sub-section and explained by Migliorino and, even more likely, because talking about politics in Syria has always been perceived as dangerous.[638]

The lack of national and political consciousness in Syria is also related to the hegemonic role of pan-Arabism, not with Arabism *per se.* In fact, "no intellectual has yet stepped forward to articulate and advocate such an ideology (and intellectuals are almost universally the inventors of nationalism). This is hardly surprisingly as "Arabism is still the official ideology".[639] As for Christian minorities, al-Tamimi observes that most Syrian Christians share pan-Arabism. However, this is not equivalent to saying they share al-Assad's pan-Arabism.[640]

However, from the analysis of Syrians in diaspora, it is clear that pan-Arabism is not the primary interest at the popular level, to use the Gramscian term. In a side comment on a question in the interview-based questionnaire, a participant in Sydney said: "*We were told to be Arab, but being Arab means very little*". In the surveys, pan-Arabism received a very low score of importance in both the case studies is predictable given that Armenians retain their own ethnicity. This is not surprising for the Syrian Armenian case given that Armenians were identified as non-Arabs in the past, so that pan-Arabism is not representative for all Syrian minorities. Sentiments of grief were expressed by interviewees in statements such as: "*Do not call me Arab, I hate Arabs*", or by the lack of trust as in "*I do not trust Arabs anymore*", which makes the participants converge to the sentimental sphere of the nation.

As far as Arabism as a form of identity affiliation is concerned, a vast majority of participants in Sydney did not choose "Arab". In the Australian case study, the pattern of coincidence between Syrian and Australian identity was repeated. The vast majority of respondents gave the same importance to the Australian and Syrian identity. For

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[637] Silverstein (2012), p. 36.
[638] Migliorino (2012).
[639] Sadowski (1984).
[640] Al-Tamimi (2014).

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Christian groups, this was often associated with Christian identity. For Sunni and Alawi groups, group affiliation often emerged as less relevant (score of 2 or 3 in E – Sunni and G – Alawi). The differentiation of responses is explained by the complexity in the layers of Syrian identities outside (and supposedly inside) Syria.

Only five participants out of 37 gave a score of 2 (on the scale of 5 where 1 is the most important), two were neutral with a score of 3, and three decided that Arab was not important (two score of 4 and one score of 5). For Arabism as a political proposal, again, the vast majority left the choice of "pan-Arabism" blank. Where it was ticked, the participants expressed strong disagreement. No one agreed on pan-Arabism as a credible political proposal for Syria.

Contrary to Arab homogenisation, a degree of Syrian distinctiveness is conveyed by the response:

> *We do not talk about politics often, but sometimes a group of us feels that we have to raise our voice and our political identity. Now Syrians are building their own community independently from the Lebanese and the Arab community in Sydney, because of the new arrivals and the rising number of Syrians.*[641]

Syrian immigrants who arrived in Australia in the 1970s were outnumbered by the Lebanese diaspora in Australia[642] and remained indistinct from them to the extent that Lebanese and Arab became terms almost used interchangeably. Without being asked, when talking about Syrian national identity one participant referred to the Armenian case:

> *Armenians for instance were respected and given Muslim lands from the ministry of religion after the persecution. In the revolution, some Armenians were in the left side (communist) of the opposition. They are very Syrian nationalists, more than Arab Syrians.*

Another interviewee began his talk with a sentence that says much about a Syrian distinctive character: "*Syria has never been Arab or Muslim it has always been Syrian*".[643]

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[641] Interview, participant 1, Sydney.
[642] On the Lebanese diaspora in Australia see Bayeh, J. (2014). *The literature of the Lebanese diaspora: Representations of place and transnational identity.* London: I.B. Tauris.
[643] Interview, participant 2, Sydney.

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National pride of being Syrian emerges from many interviews. A respondent asserted:

> *For me, being Syrian is an honour. Syria is a traditionally human*
> *society with a long cultural history. We have contributed much to*
> *Arabic Literature and have a proud tradition of oral and written poetry.*
> *There is much else that makes me proud, such as the various religious*
> *festivals we celebrate, our TV dramas, the architecture, our cuisine and*
> *our sports men and women.*[644]

For another interviewee history, traditions and diversity are elements for Syrian diasporans that make them proud of their heritage: *"Our ancient human civilization that goes back thousands of years and the ethnic and religious diversity is our prosperity even though it has been threatened by the conflict".*[645] Identity is a form of resilience in this response: *"I believe we have a special stable identity however much we shift from one place to another and we are able to adapt to every situation".*[646]

The formation of a national consciousness also takes the shape of in-group attitudes towards Syrians and out-group hostility towards externals (meaning non-Syrians). An interviewee in Sydney said:

> *Syrian people and the Syrian community here is like a mosaic; you cannot*
> *really differentiate; only if you go in depth you can see the differences.*
> *There are two parts in the Syrian community here, the ones who arrived in*
> *the 1970s and the new arrivals who are still looking for their establishment.*
> *[...] The fighters for the opposition came from 83 different countries and*
> *not more of the 23% of groups that commit atrocities are Syrians. The rest*
> *are foreigners.*[647]

The threat of violence is thought to come from outsiders, not from Syrians themselves, as shown by another interviewee: *"Most of those fighters are not Syrians; they come prisons overseas where there was no longer space or money to keep them there, so they sent them to Syria".*[648]

Syrian distinctiveness does not translate into the pan-Syrian discourse.

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[644] Interview, participant 5, Melbourne.
[645] Interview, participant 7, Melbourne.
[646] Interview, participant 4, Melbourne.
[647] Interview, participant 7, Sydney.
[648] Interview, participant 3, Sydney.

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Interviewees mostly ignored pan-Syrianism, but contrary to pan-Arabism, some expressed a degree of agreement on it representing a possible solution, even more so in the Armenian case study. Interestingly, the concept refers to Syria as historically including the territory of *al-Sham*, which goes from present-day Turkey to present-day Iraq including Lebanon and Jordan. The mention of pan-Syrianism in the Armenian case study is interesting, because some territories of the ancestral Armenian homeland once belonged to greater Syria.

Overall, the responses suggest that the Syrian national consciousness in the popular view was conceived despite pan-Arabism, rather than because of it. The cultural and political propaganda with its stress on pan-Arabism followed an opposite direction. The non-coincidence between the political and the popular view reflects the gap between Syrian nationalism of the population and Arab-Syrian nationalism of the elites. The paradox of the pan-Arab discourse is that it starts from a higher dimension (Arabism) to construct a lower dimension (nationalism). The elements posed in Chapter 3 show that identity formation is a gradual process, composed of different steps of intensity.

To build nationalism by using pan-Arabism is like starting from upstairs in the construction of a building. Under these circumstances, pan-Arabism's fate is that it is only held to be "superficial".[649] What is even more concerning about this ideology is that it denies the foundations of identity in the Middle East, that is, the religious dimension. As Shulze et al. point out, the lines of allegiance in the Middle East are "peculiarly complicated" and "often contradictory", but religion is "a crucial domain in which identity is contested and negotiated".[650] To suppress minority identity in the Middle East is not the best way to pose nationalism.

As Ajami notes, "Arabism postulates the existence of a single Arab Nation behind the facade of a multiplicity of sovereign states".[651] This may also be valid for the existence of a Syrian nation beyond the multiplicity of Syrian groups. However, the two forms of identification are in the wrong order: the latter postulation should come first, not the former. Consequently, pan-Arabism is not untenable in itself, since it can still be a powerful tool of identification in a heterogeneous society like Syria. What is misleading in the use of the pan-Arab discourse is that it precedes nationalism and is a

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[649] See also Ajami (1978).
[650] Schulze, Stokes and Campbell (1996), p. 188.
[651] Ajami (1978), p. 357.

way to bypass the minority/majority issue.

5.8 Conclusion

The weakness of Syrian nationalism resides at the political level rather than being justified by group sub-national attachments. In Syria, the defective ring of the chain of national identification described in the first section of this chapter – construction by ethnicity, identification by culture and maintenance by politics – is not the first one, represented by ethnicity, as might be assumed. Minoritarian identity, closely related to the ethnic identity, is still an important root of national identity, but it is not necessarily an obstacle for national belonging.

Syrian groups have fluid and permeable borders, to the extent that the prevalence of an identity affiliation is not detectable or changes according to the political and historical circumstances. The voluntary dimension of the Armenian identity and its adaptability to the Syrian host country represents a perfect instance of the construction of national identity starting from the ethnic or primordial identity, and of the non-obstruction between ethnic, religious and national identity. The social construction of primordial identity appears the most suitable explanation both for the coexistence of the Syrian with the Armenian affiliation and the prevalence of the Syrian over the Armenian.

To impose prevalence is a political interest that, in Syria, has been shaped by the pan-Arab discourse. On pan-Arabism, the non-coincidence between the political and the popular view on Syrian identity has emerged. Gramsci's concept of the nation-popular has been particularly suitable for understanding such dichotomy. As Gramsci predicted in addressing situations when the nationalist discourse does not permeate the sentiments of the masses, Syrian pan-Arab nationalism remained an ideological stance. Nationalism in Syria is a popular sentiment, and Arabism remained a pure ideology at the state level because of a blurred interchanging of Arab nationalism, pan-Syrianism and the minority card used in the political sphere.

The compliance with the regime and Arabist slogans by Christian groups in official occasions remains valid. However, by looking behind the surface of official occasions, pan-Arabism was felt to be a negligible or unrepresentative component of Syrian diasporans' identity in both case studies. This suggests that, despite the authoritarian rule of Syria, Syrian national identity is constructed regardless of pan-

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Arabism rather than because of it. The political significance of the minority/majority until now implies that pan-Arabism is unsuccessful as an ideology that aims to overcome group attachments.

The responses of diasporans on Syrian nationalism tend to avoid addressing the effects of the current crisis and converge towards the sentimental sphere of the nation, or patriotism, and express a degree of political detachment. The conflict has impacted how diasporans consider Syria as a state, to the extent that participants see Syria after the crisis as a "mix of territories". Interestingly, in the context of Syria at war, Syrians come first, and then Syria as a nation. The conflict emerges as an important topic in the next two chapters that deal with religious identity in more depth.

Chapter 6. Sectarianisation in Syria and sectarian identity in diaspora

6.1 Introduction

With the decline of Arabism, both sectarianism and Islamism emerged as the most relevant phenomena after the outbreak of the conflict in Syria in 2011.[652] The analysis of sectarianism in present-day Syria is more complicated than Shia versus Sunni discourse, and even more complex because there is no historical distance from the events. Investigating the relevance of sectarianism (and Islamism as explicitly opposed to secularism in the next chapter) in Syria requires focus on the political discourse, which has been considered an important corollary in the recent literature on sectarianisation as a political process.[653]

Due to the unfinished nature of the events, sectarian feelings in the ongoing Syrian conflict are reconsidered using the evidence from Chapter 3 that their saliency occurs in periods of political instability. Understanding to what extent sectarian feelings have experienced a revival in Syria is important for determining how this impacts Syrian communities in diaspora. Less academic attention has been paid to sectarianism as a socio-political phenomenon. As Nikolaos van Dam notes, while in the Middle East this category is often picked as a justification of political instability, its social "relevance is rarely demonstrated".[654] The aim is to reconsider sectarianism as an instrumental apparatus rather than as an analytical category.

Following the results from the analysis of the theories on identity in Chapter 3, this chapter approaches sectarianism as a socio-political instrumental category. Seen that way, sectarian strife is not the reason for the conflict but rather the outcome of political mobilisation and/or exploitation of sectarian loyalties. The explicit use of sectarianism in the political discourse is implemented for manipulating and polarising political support in periods of unrest and is also a strategy in creating a particular historical bloc. Under what conditions do sectarian feelings become politically salient in Syria? To what extent does this influence the lives of Syrian diasporans?

After a theoretical analysis on the politicised nature of sectarian feelings in modern Syria and in the ongoing conflict, the chapter focuses on how this

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[652] Khashanah (2013), p. 13.
[653] Hashemi, N. and Postel, D. (2017). "Sectarianization: Mapping the new politics of the Middle East." *The Review of Faith & International Affairs,* 15 (3), 1-13.
[654] Van Dam (1981).

politicisation influences what being Syrian means outside Syria. The effects on Syrian diasporic identification are investigated. The responses of Syrian diasporans surveyed on sectarianism tend to confirm the political nature of sectarianism. Participants did not cover sectarianism in length during interviews, because it was not felt to be a social issue. A sectarian political agenda is generally considered to be a response to a vacuum of power or state-collapse circumstances.

Empirical data shows two different outcomes of sectarianism: the emergence of the solidarity-generating potentiality of sectarianism from below, and politicised sectarian identity is associated with tension also in diaspora as a reflection of the sectarianisation of the conflict. The analysis of such dichotomy can offer interesting indications for understanding how sectarian feelings can coexist with each other and within the political system in and outside Syria.

6.2 Sectarianism in Syria

Attributes of sectarianism

In this thesis, the term sect is used as the literal translation of the Arabic "ṭa'ifa". In Arabic, the term is used in everyday language to distinguish religious minorities from the Sunni majority. The adjectival noun "sectarianism" *ṭa'ifiyya* was coined later. Osman has already connected Ibn Khaldunian ᶜaṣabiyya translating into "group feeling" with *ṭa'ifiyya* or "sectarian feeling"[655]; and the concept of "group feeling" is also applicable to more recent times in Syria, because Ibn Khaldun conceives it as dynamic, changing according to and perfectly adaptable to the particular historical phase.[656] It is an effective political tool for establishing and maintaining power. In Ibn Khaldun's thought, sectarian feelings are often associated with "fight" (*sirāᶜ* in Arabic), something that could easily reinforce the thesis of sectarianism as generating divisiveness. In Osman's view, it is always overtaken by its destructive nature as "inevitably productive of conflict".[657] A strong impact metaphor by van Dam conveys the negativity of sectarianism in Syria, which is "seen as a dangerous social disease, which should be combated with all possible means since it supposedly strengthens

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[655] Osman (2014), p. 13

[656] For further details about Ibn Khaldun as a "culture specific" and "universal phenomenon" see Azmeh, Z. (1990). *Ibn Khaldun.* London: Routledge.

[657] Osman, K. (2014). *Sectarianism in Iraq: the making of state and nation since 1920.* New York: Routledge, p. 36.

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social divisiveness".[658]

This thesis does not question the well-known negative and conflict-generating effects, but considers the effects as the consequence of, and not the reason for, political crises. The reasonably negative connotations of the term throughout history do not affect *a priori* the neutrality of the term as the membership in a historically and doctrinally defined religious community. Politically intended sectarianism can be defined as the formation of different political groups around such membership. Following Ibn Khaldun, the group feeling in Arab groups is *per se* political, which in his view leads to them aspiring to a position of superiority. [659] Given that, as Ibn Khaldun notes, sectarian feelings are sometimes "necessary"[660] because "political society"[661] may strictly depend on it, what matters is its legitimation.

Sectarianism and political crises: Aleppo 1850, Hama 1982 and Homs 2011

Ussama Makdisi, focusing specifically on the political sphere between 1840 and 1860 and the "murderous struggle between the Druzes and Maronites of Mount Lebanon", highlights the modern significance of sectarianism and its social impact: "Sectarianism is a modern story, and, for those intimately involved in its unfolding, it is *the* modern story – a story that has and that continues to define and dominate their [of Druze and Maronite communities of Lebanon] lives". [662] This chapter asks, instead, whether sectarianism in the homeland influences the lives of Syrian diasporans.

Makdisi's approach is far from the classical views that consider sectarianism simply a "foreign conspiracy", a "disease that prevents modernization", or a "failure" of nationalism and secularisation in the Middle East. [663] He tries to narrate sectarianism purely as a constituent of modern history. To reduce it to only one side of the matter – negative, violence, outside history – leads to historical oversimplifications. In this thesis, three pre-concepts also delineated by Makdisi are overcome: firstly, the identification of sectarianism as the main reason for preventing

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[658] Van Dam (1981), p. 26.
[659] Ibn Khaldun (1973), p. 265.
[660] Ibn Khaldun (1973), p. 265
[661] Ghalioun, B. (1997). El islamismo como identidad política: o la relación del mundo musulmán con la modernidad [in Spanish]. *Revista CIDOB d'afers internacionals,* 36(01), p. 107.
[662] Makdisi, U. (2000). *The culture of sectarianism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 2.
[663] On the negative meanings of sectarianism see Haddad, F. (2017). "Sectarianism and Its discontents in the study of the Middle East." *The Middle East Journal,* 71(3), 363-382.

secularism[664] and nationalism; secondly, the conception of sectarianism as connected only with violence and religious fanaticism; and thirdly, the antithesis between sectarianism and modernity. One of the most important contributions of Makdisi's work is bringing sectarianism back into the sphere of history and humanity, away from the state of isolation where it is located.

Makdisi stresses the necessity of estimating "connections" and "contradictions" between "sectarian actions" and discourses of elites and between public and private actors. According to Makdisi,

> On the one hand, it was a culture of the elites, who fought to keep their privileges intact and to maintain a hierarchical social order; on the other hand, sectarianism also reflected popular visions of the future, of liberation in a new landscape.[665]

The distinction made by Makdisi between sectarianism from above and popular formulations of sectarian feelings is the main focus of this chapter.

The following discussion on single but interrelated episodes of sectarian tension in Syria shows that the destructive power of sectarianism emerges after political crises in conditions of insecurity and instability of power. Unquestionably, sectarianism can be related to political antagonism and violence in some cases. However, sectarianism is not always the primary source of the violent escalation. Rather, it can justify the exacerbation of violence. In all the events discussed, the exploitation of sectarian solidarity serves to maintain the basis of support and power as a response to political antagonism.[666]

Communal riots in Aleppo in 1850, the Hama uprising in 1982 and the rebellion that started in Homs in early 2011 are episodes in the history of sectarian violence in Syria and are embedded in Syrian historical memory. The violence of Hama, in particular, has remained impressed in the memories of Syrians who witnessed it and is considered a tragic chapter of Syrian sectarian history. The responses of diasporans provide evidence of this, since interviews included references that indicate parallels between the current Syrian conflict and the Hama uprising. A participant said:

> *I still have in my mind the atrocities of the Hama uprising. Like today,*
> *people were fed up with the authoritarian regime and the sectarian*
> *expansion of its own sect. Back then, the Muslim Brotherhood made use of*
> *the force to oppose the regime, making its game. The regime was only*

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[664] On secularism, see next chapter.
[665] Makdisi (2000), p. 3.
[666] Farouk-Alli (2014), p. 221.

waiting for the use of force to do mass killings and atrocities against its
population. I was there. I was doing the military service.[667]

In the same interview, the link between Hama and the recent uprising was soon clear:

Now, it is like all Syrian towns are Hama. It is different because the army is
important but no longer enough for the regime to resist. There are other
global actors, and the regime could not contain the opposition even though
it used violence from the first day, while the first eight months of the
revolution were peaceful.[668]

Another interviewee, a member of the Melkite Church, also recalled the legacy of Hama and said: "*The fighters of al-Nusra [later known as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham] and ISIS are the descendants of Muslim Brothers who started the tragedies of Hama*".[669] He also goes back to the clashes of Aleppo in 1850 talking about religious coexistence: "*Sects in Syria have not always been minorities; they have become minorities because of massacres like in Aleppo in 1850 and forced conversions. The conflict within religions reflects social and political divisions*".[670] The political nature of sectarianism and its link with religious strife is highlighted here.

The respondents are reflecting on past events in a retrospective way through a lens that is drawn from more recent events. The main focus is on the current tensions, and the memories of previous episodes help interpret them as advanced repetitions. Remembering precedents of sectarian tensions in Syrian history when talking about recent events suggests that sectarianism in Syria is not a social constant, but rather goes through political phases. Many participants commented using the same expression: "*Before the conflict there was no tension between Christians and Muslims in Syria*".[671] They feel that the tension was created.[672] The Melkite interviewee defined sectarianism as "*politically useful, since like cancer it destroys the country from the inside*".

It is important to understand these historical moments to evaluate the extent to which sectarian violence impacts the narratives of Syrian diasporans. Contrary to the

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[667] Interview, participant 1, Sydney.
[668] Interview, participant 1, Sydney..
[669] Interview, participant 3, Sydney.
[670] Interview, participant 3, Sydney.
[671] Miscellaneous interviews.
[672] Miscellaneous interviews.

intellectual insight that considers sectarian feelings as the origin of the conflicts in the Middle East, attributing a socio-political value to diasporans' perceptions of sectarianism, empirical evident suggests that sectarianism contributes to the complexity of crises, not to the crisis itself. Especially in the case of Syria, there are factors, other than sectarianism, that converge to originate religious strife.[673]

An early example is the first case of sectarian antagonism in Aleppo in 1850 that was recalled in the interview fragment above. In October 1850, communal rioting wracked the city of Aleppo in northern Syria, with violence directed against the city's prosperous Christian minority. Only Muslims in the eastern quarters alone participated, and the Catholic communities of Judayda, in particular, attracted the rioters' fury.[674] The events are well described by Masters:

> The mob then advanced on the predominately Christian suburbs of Judayda and Saliba to the north of the city's walls, where they began to loot and pillage. That evening and throughout the next day, Muslims invaded churches and private homes in the Christian quarters. Christians were attacked and several were killed outright; others later died of the wounds they received at the hands of the rioters.[675]

As Reilly points out, tensions were "variables" and not constants of what he define a "hard ethnic order" like the millet system in Syria.[676] In the events of 1850 in Aleppo, commonly described as religious clashes between Christian and Muslim inhabitants[677], other causes of instability can be identified, other than sectarian religious hostility alone.

One factor is the frame of social discontinuity created by the nineteenth century's reforms: with the implementation of the reforms, consensus politics were no longer enacted, since Muslim and non-Muslim communities came to share the same institutional position.[678] A second factor of instability was created by the integration of the city of Aleppo into the capitalist world. The reforms led to a growth in economic European influence on the Ottoman Empire to the extent that European powers could intensify their control on trade.[679] The Christians, who acted as

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[673] See chapter 3.

[674] Masters, B. (1990). "The 1850 events in Aleppo: an aftershock of Syria's incorporation into the capitalist world system." *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* 22(1), 3-20, p. 3.

[675] Masters (1990), p. 4.

[676] Reilly, J. (1996). "Inter-confessional relations in nineteenth-century Syria: Damascus, Homs and Hama compared". *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations,* 7 (2), 213-224, p. 215.

[677] The events included pillages and attacks on mostly Catholic and Armenian Churches. http://www.caus.org.lb/PDF/EmagazineArticles/mustaqbal_415_johndavid.pdf (accessed on January 23 2017).

[678] Masters (1990), p. 5.

[679] Masters (1990), p. 15.

middlemen between the Ottoman Empire and the Europeans, benefited from this. They were able to obtain tax exemptions thanks to their mediation role, and the competition with Muslim tradespeople became greater than before.[680] Economic competition is a key in capitalistic relationships, and led Christian merchants to prefer European partnerships rather than old partnerships with local Muslim merchants.[681]

In the specific case of Aleppo, such a dynamic particularly interested the Catholic residents of Judayda quarter, the target of the riot in 1850 and the focus of European interest in Aleppo. As Masters explains:

> The Christians of Judayda had taken advantage of new economic conditions and the liberal policies of the Tanzimat to end the vestiges of their former inferiority, but in doing so they were driving a wedge between themselves and the rest of the inhabitants of the city.[682]

The creation of European partnerships with Rome, for example, in which Judayda's merchants became commercial partners[683] created a friction between them and their former local partners.

Masters's comments on the change in economic partnerships are compelling: "The inhabitants of Judayda, unlike the inhabitants of the eastern quarters, had voluntarily chosen to disassociate themselves from the city's tradition of brokered politics".[684] Client relationships with European powers preferred over those with Sunni burghers afflicted former civic ties that once held them together.[685] The fracture in civic bonds also occurred in the intellectual sphere, which is the third factor for social disjuncture between the Christians and Muslims of Aleppo. The intellectuals were not able to mitigate the effects of the changes since the intellectual class itself was experiencing a transition phase. As Watenpaugh observes, a new intellectual stratum (composed of journalists, historians, and modern forms of cultural organisations) was emerging in the late Ottoman period creating an intellectual substratum underneath the *a'yān,* translating into "notables" or elite.[686]

Political violence and clashes between Muslims and Christians in Ottoman Syria continued into late 1850. The incidents occurred during a period of general religious

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[680] Masters (1990), p. 16.
[681] Masters (1990), p. 15.
[682] Masters (1990), p. 17.
[683] Masters (1990).
[684] Masters (1990).
[685] Masters (1990).
[686] Watenpaugh, K. (2003). "Middle-class modernity and the persistence of the politics of notables in inter-war Syria". *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* 35 (2), 257-286, p. 259.

tensions in the Ottoman Empire before the Crimean War.[687] At this time, "a native Catholic stood up in the bazar fully armed and loudly called on the Christians to attack the Mussulmans"[688] in an attempt to take revenge for the 1850 attacks. In Damascus, Tibawi describes similar incidents, where the antipathies between Muslims and native Christians were the result of Muslims' "rage against foreign Christians".[689] The two Syrian cities of Hama and Homs are an exception in the violent escalation to the extent that Reilly takes them as exemplars of inter-communal coexistence during the late Ottoman period. There, while religious differences were part of social and personal life, they did not generate political violence at that time.[690]

More than a century later, with periods of serious unrest in between as noted in the previous chapters, Hama was the scene of the most significant event of sectarian struggle in Syria. The Hama uprising remains an instance of the manipulation of sectarian feelings in Syria. Goldsmith correctly identifies it as a phase of sectarian violence and politicisation.[691] As van Dam points out, this was also a reaction to the "Aleppo massacre" in 1979.[692] In his view, it was the Muslim extremist opposition that started enforcing violent sectarian feelings with anti-Alawi and Alawi assassinations during "Aleppo massacres". [693] Conduit notes "Sporadic violence undertaken by the Vanguard continued across the country over the following years, some of which was carried out in cooperation with Brotherhood members linked to the Syrian Islamic Front".[694]

Mutatis mutandis, as it was during the clashes of 1850 in Aleppo, sectarianism alone is not sufficient to understand religious tension in Syria in the Hama uprising. Dara Conduit explains the economic causes of the revolt that followed the nationalisation of Syrian economy under the establishment of the Ba'athist regime leaving small private businesses extremely discontent.[695] Sectarian and economic cleavages coexisted in Hama, where two thirds of the population was Sunni Muslim

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[687] Tibawi refers to other case, as in Palestine with the eruption of the Qais feud and in the Nusairiyyad region, where Christians were in revolt against the Muslim rule. Tibawi (1969), p. 122.
[688] Tibawi (1969), p. 123.
[689] Tibawi (1969).
[690] Reilly, J. (1996). "Inter-confessional relations in nineteenth-century Syria: Damascus, Homs and Hama compared." *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations, 7*(2), 213-224, p. 222.
[691] Reilly (1996), p. 396.
[692] van Dam (1981), p. 107.
[693] van Dam (1981), p. 116.
[694] Conduit, D. (2016). "The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and the spectacle of Hama". *The Middle East Journal,* 70 (2), 211-226, p. 214.
[695] Conduit, D. (2017). "The patterns of Syrian uprising: Comparing Hama in 1980–1982 and Homs in 2011". *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies,* 44 (1), 73-87, p. 75.

and more than a third were self-employed and owning small businesses.[696]

The minority versus majority discourse was at stake at that time for justifying unequal rule and uneven access to economic resources. The national emancipation of the Alawi sect was one of the motives used by the Salafi Syrian Muslim Brotherhood to mobilise the Sunni majority against the minority rule.[697] Under the umbrella of a common discontent with the regime, the Brotherhood had the support of Hama's population and was backed by non-Islamist Sunni support that constituted "a secular opposition including lawyers, merchants, professional syndicates, Nasserites, Communists and dissident Ba'athists". [698] Escalations of strikes and violence culminated when opposition groups declared Hama liberated as the major stand against the regime.[699]

Differences within the Sunni majority emerged from the sectarian political contraposition between the Sufi and the Salafi brotherhood during the Hama uprising. As Weismann observes, in Syria "Sufi brotherhoods appear to have transformed themselves into new forms of religious organizations". [700] He refers to the Naqshbandiyya as the leading Naqshbandi branch of Ahmad Kuftaro. [701] Before Hama's events, "Sufism permeated Hawwa's [leader of the Muslim Brotherhood at the time of the Hama uprising] entire oeuvre" to the extent that he could be considered Kuftaro's precursor in the reformist Sufi tradition.[702] The movement that enjoyed autonomy under al-Assad, especially in the private education sector, and generally good relations with the regime [703], after the uprising had "the only alternative" [704] of accommodating collaboration with the regime and opposing the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. After the alignment of Sufi groups with the regime, Hawwa distanced himself from Sufism.

Hafez al-Assad used military action to repress the revolt and it succeeded thanks to the unity and strength of his military apparatus.[705] Conduit describes the reaction as a siege of three weeks with "a level of brutality unprecedented in contemporary

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[696] Conduit (2017), p. 77.
[697] Van Dam (1981), p. 133.
[698] Conduit (2017), p. 75.
[699] Conduit (2017), p. 76.
[700] Weismann, I. (2005). "The politics of popular religion: Sufis, Salafis, and Muslim brothers in 20th-century Hamah". *Journal of Middle East Studies,* 37 (1), 39-58, p. 43.
[701] Weismann (2005).
[702] Weismann (2005), p. 45.
[703] Weismann (2005).
[704] Weismann (2005), p. 47.
[705] Van Dam (1981), p. 110.

Syria".[706] Hinnebusch clarifies that the opposition lost the battle but the reasons for the discontent remained rooted in Syrian sensibility.[707] Rioters, cells of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, were incarcerated or forced into exile, but continued to foment discontent against the regime from outside Syria[708], until the time was propitious for a new revolt in 2011.

The Syrian conflict was initiated by the uprising that took place in Homs in 2011. Like Hama's population, Homs's population is composed of mostly Sunni Muslims, which makes the use of the sectarian card an easy shortcut in the evolution of the events. As Farha and Mousa point out, "Sectarianism has been recognized as having an exceptional mobilizing power which leaders are liable to tap into to rally followers behind defensive or offensive campaigns".[709] Opposition groups, well described by Reinoud Leenders, drove the offensive campaign:

> Angered by the regime's humiliating use of violence against early protests, an increasing number of Syrians cast their movement, at home and abroad, as an imperative to take to the streets, brave the risks of regime violence, and challenge it in the teeth of power, first by calling for fundamental reforms and then quickly for the regime's overthrow.[710]

The regime responded with the use of the force on early protests because it also wanted to escape the fate of the other leaders who had fallen in the Egyptian, Tunisian and Libyan uprisings.[711]

The sectarianisation that followed the repression of the protests is analysed in depth later in this chapter. It is important to emphasise that sectarian cleavages were parallel to the economic ones that had first driven the rebellion. Conduit, comparing the Hama and the Homs uprisings, points out that Homs was one of those peripheral and rural cities where the liberalisation initiated in the 2000s by Bashar al-Assad resulted in the economic marginalisation and impoverishment of the citizens.[712]

Phillips identifies reasons for the social unrest in Syria other than sectarianism. He has already re-dimensioned the primary importance of sectarianism in the Syrian conflict appropriately defining it "semi-sectarian".[713] According to him, ideological,

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[706] Conduit (2017), p. 215.
[707] Hinnebusch (1995), p. 249.
[708] Conduit (2017), p. 78.
[709] Conduit (2017), p. 79.
[710] Leenders, R. (2015). "Repression is not 'a Stupid Thing': Regime responses to the Syrian uprising and insurgency." In *The Alawis of Syria* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 249.
[711] Leenders, R. (2015), p. 250.
[712] Conduit (2017), p. 84.
[713] Phillips (2013), p. 357.

national, tribal other sub-state ties, and above all, class factors are at stake.[714] Again, economic, political, social and cultural elements play simultaneous roles. These roles are considered one by one.

Firstly, as far as the economic explanation is concerned, Phillips observes that the majority of Sunni opposition in the Syrian conflict belongs to the rural class (with the exception of a few Sunni merchants of Aleppo and Damascus), since protests were absent in richer Sunni villages.[715] Homs, where the unrest started, is considered the agricultural belt of Syria and was hit by the economic liberalisation that started in Syria in the late 2000s.[716] Phillips adds that there was the Syrian "wealthy west" loyalty to the regime and the "poor east" alignment with the rebels.[717] Economic benefit and opportunism has also indistinctly driven the political choices of Sunni tribes and non-Sunni actors.

Secondly, as for the ideological dimension, short-term and long-term factors[718] contribute to shape the political lines. The long-term ideas of "ancient hatreds" between communities and "fears of extinction"[719] are likely to recur as the legacy of past religious tensions. In the previous chapter, the switch from the "preferred Muslims" of the Ottoman rule to the "preferred Christians" of the French rule created vacuums of legitimation in the management of inter-ethnic and inter-religious coexistence while at the same time keeping continuity between the two.

Thirdly and fourthly, the political prerequisite for sectarian discourse to take place in current Syria is represented by "local state collapse" in some areas and imposition of rule in others.[720] The violent outcome of ethno-sectarian feelings occurs when the state no longer has reasons to function at the local level. This also depends on long-term factors, since it depends on the level of state-establishment in the areas. The stability of the state is influenced by the history of inter-ethnic coexistence in the areas. In Latakyia, the place of birth of the Syrian president and a place with a long history of inter-ethnic and inter-religious harmony, the two coincided. As Phillips notes, Latakyia has not witnessed ethno-religious clashes but rather the presence of

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[714] Phillips (2013), p. 366.
[715] Phillips (2013), p. 361.
[716] Conduit (2017), p. 84.
[717] Conduit (2017).
[718] Kaufman, S. J. (2006). "Symbolic politics or rational choice? Testing theories of extreme ethnic violence." *International Security,* 30 (4), 45-86, p, 48.
[719] Kaufman (2006).
[720] Phillips (2014), p. 361.

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"refugees of all sects, despite the political dominance of Alawis there".[721]

On the other hand, in Homs, the local "state collapse" has led to ethno-religious violence and has attracted sectarian actors such as the Shabiha and sectarian Islamists".[722] One of the Christian Syrian activists interviewed by the Syrian writer Afra Jalabi connects the repression by the regime with the Islamisation of the groups and claims: "The rise of Islamism in the country is more a reaction to the constant provocations of the Assad regime and a way of reclaiming an identity under constant siege".[723]

The use of force on protesters, killings and imprisonments of activists by the regime soon caused the radicalisation of the opposition with further waves of protests that reached the most important Syrian cities of Aleppo and Damascus.[724] Before that, as Leenders suggests, the sectarian dimension was still absent and both the regime and the opposition groups sought to avoid it.[725] The regime aspired to remain the protector of sectarian balance in Syria, while the protesters stressed that their claims were not positioned on a sectarian ground but rather directed to a regime change and reforms that could bring more justice and equality in Syria.[726] The use of the sectarian card took place at a later stage, with the escalation of violence and the polarisation between fronts, including the intervention of international actors who financed the opposition or backed the regime. At that point, the violent response meant severe insecurity and loss of legitimation on the regime's side, something that it is essential for the maintenance of minority rule.[727]

Sectarianism and minority rule

Sectarianism, as also seen in the previous two chapters, is a divide and rule strategy of power imposition and rule management in religiously and ethnically diverse societies like Syria. In Syria, sectarianism was a component of the minority rule in periods of instability, especially since the ruling class belongs to the Alawi sect. Governing classes drawn from minority groups can broaden the spectrum of their political support to legitimise their dominance. The less legitimacy the regime has, the more

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[721] Phillips (2014), p. 361.
[722] Phillips (2014).
[723] Jalabi in Hashemi and Postel (2013), p. 82
[724] Leenders (2015), p. 250.
[725] Leenders (2015), p. 253.
[726] Leenders (2015), p. 253.
[727] Hashemi and Postel (2013), p. 2.

the minority rule has to rely on authoritarian power.[728]

The discontent with a political regime is one of the major determinants for the outbreak of sectarian strife. As Farha and Mousa explain, the dialectic between sectarian equilibrium and sectarian violence[729] depends on the way in which ruling groups foster inter-communal relations "under the auspices of a strong state".[730] Oppressive rulers in terms of sectarianism are those "who did not shy from engaging in resorting back to the card of sectarian exclusion to strengthen their rule".[731] Feelings of insecurity and unequal access to state resources are also provoked by what citizens see as authoritarian rulers.[732]

Some interviewees described how the regime was sectarian and authoritarian[733] at the same time. A Syrian Australian activist explained the effects of political repression in Syria and said:

> *I had been living in Syria for 30 years as a scientist, but I could not be a real scientist in Syria because of the regime's restrictions on research. I know why people are so angry at the regime that is nearly a sect-kingdom and repressed any form of political opposition instead of appeasing protesters. There is no longer trust between the government and the people. Trust me, there is no family in Syria that has not experienced once in their lives the enforcement of the Syrian Army, if not torture and imprisonment.*[734]

Another activist also mentioned the sectarian nature of repressive politics saying that "*the regime was first interested in the expansion of its own sect and did not leave space to alternative political movements*".[735] Three participants in the survey, commenting on the question on the definition of the regime, reported that it is a "dictatorship" and "a police state", and "it is not an independent political regime because it depends on sectarian support".[736]

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728 See chapter 3.
729 Farha and Mousa (2015), p. 18.
730 Farha and Mousa (2015), p. 19.
731 Farha and Mousa (2015).
732 See chapter 3.
733 Haklai (2000), p. 26.
734 Interview, participant 2, Melbourne.
735 Interview, participant 3, Sydney.
736 Survey results, participants 28, 32 and 35.

Burhan Ghalioun explains the relationship between dominance and sectarianism. According to him, the reason for the negative side of sectarian identity is its politicisation and the illegitimate "dominance" (*sulṭa*) of a certain group over others.[737] Goldsmith has already correlated the two concepts of political ʿaṣabiyya and sectarianism in the analysis of Alawi policy of the al-Assad regime connecting repressive policies and insecurity to sectarian outcomes: "Insecurity is a primary factor in the maintenance of 'asabiyya among sectarian groups and is, therefore, an impediment to social cohesion in religiously diverse states".[738] In Ibn Khaldun's view, group feeling has a political dimension, since it is one of the forces leading to authority. Nevertheless, its role is to help the construction of society (ʿumrān, 'civilization' in his own words) and not to obstruct it, as in Goldsmith's interpretation.

In a passage of his recent study on Khaldunian thought, the Syrian scholar al-Sa'aidah outlines: "the corruption (*fasād)* of group feeling in the ruling and competing groups corresponds to the corruption of the state". Following al-Sa'aidah' and Ibn Khaldun, it is generally correct to connect ʿaṣabiyya to sectarianism and insecurity, but the link comes after and not before the "decadence" or "corruption" of the state. It is not the strength of group feeling and sectarian identity that leads to conflict, but the political manipulation of sectarian feelings.

Furthermore, Goldsmith argues that al-Assad regime's reinforced ʿaṣabiyya prevented Alawi natural inclinations towards genuine "pluralism and religious coexistence".[739] The resulting tragedy and paradox, also noticed by Goldsmith, is that the sectarian takeover contradicts the "Baʿathist ideal of secular society in which all Arabs – I would also add all Syrians – irrespective of their religion, could equally participate".[740] It is true that the Alawi religious foundations are based on pluralism and religious tolerance.[741] As Farouk-Alli notes, Alawis have experienced different political identities and have constantly internally divided on political choices.[742]

In the millet system, Alawis were at best marginalised and at worst religiously persecuted.[743] The review on theories in Chapter 3 shows that a common history of

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[737] Ghalioun, B. (2012). *Al-masa'alh al- ṭā'iffyya wa al-mushkilah al-ʿaqallyyāt [in Arabic: The issue of sectarianism and the problem of minorities*]. Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies, p. 105.
[738] Goldsmith, L. (2013). "'God wanted diversity': Alawite pluralist ideals and their integration into Syrian society 1832–1973." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 40 (4), 392-409.
[739] Goldsmith (2013)*,* p. 395.
[740] Farouk-Alli (2014), p. 119.
[741] Farouk-Alli (2014), p. 211.
[742] Farouk-Alli (2014), p. 208.
[743] Farouk-Alli (2014), p. 209. Farouk-Alli refers to Ibn Taymıyyah's fatwa declaring the Alawi sect as

discrimination reinforces group feeling and can more easily lead to group mobilisation when the circumstances are favourable. The pluralist discourse of the Ba'ath party represented an ideal ground for the emergence of the Alawi sect, as noted by Zaman.[744] In the case of Alawi, being a sect did not prevent it taking advantage of and being oriented towards religious pluralism. For the Alawi, the pluralist and secularist approach of the Ba'ath party represented the end of discrimination based on religion and the end of their minority status.[745]

At the same time, group feeling can be used as a political strategy to undermine multi-religious integration in society. This tool was exploited by the Ottomans and the French as well as by Alawi rulers of Syria, as Goldsmith implies. The manipulation of sectarian feelings is not the outcome of a powerful group feeling, though. In fact, the formation of Alawi group feeling was gradual and was the effect rather than the cause for its political rise. As Farouk-Alli explains:

> The community's circumstances had changed with the emergence of an educated, mobilized Alawi class with widespread prominence in the army and the Ba'th party, creating a sense of oneness amongst them, or a "communal clannishness", that was heretofore non-existent.[746]

Communal clannishness obviously led to privilege for the members of the Alawi community in accessing government positions. Once the Alawi group of rulers gained power, its group feeling started to be extended from the members of the tribes to the members of the Alawi community at large[747], and from the latter to a "broad coalition of political and social forces representing broad sectors of the Syrian people who back the regime".[748]

The emphasis on Syria as a Muslim country, the adherence of the Alawis to Islam, and the presence of Sunnis in important positions work to broaden the political apparatus and include a portion of the Sunni majority.[749] In Seale's view, al-Assad "does not want to be seen as a dictator, still less as an Alawi revanchist or as the patron of a new class".[750] Seale's judgement on this is peremptory, asserting that al-Assad has been "less than successful" in including a broader sector of the Syrian

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more disbelieving than Jews and Christians.

[744] Farouk-Alli (2014), p. 217.

[745] Farouk-Alli (2014).

[746] Farouk-Alli (2014).

[747] Farouk-Alli (2014), p. 218.

[748] Zisser, E. (2013). "Can Assad's Syria survive revolution? The struggle for Syria could take a long time to unfold." *Middle East Quarterly,* 20 (2), 65-72, p. 68.

[749] Seale in Antoun and Quataert (1991), p. 97.

[750] Seale in Antoun and Quataert (1991), p. 106.

population in the regime.[751]

Syrian parliamentary composition after 1973 can help understand in what sense al-Assad privileged Alawis at the expense of Sunni Syrians. Before 1973, Sunnis occupied almost 95% of the seats in the Syrian Parliament, with Alawis reduced to 2.2% in 1963 (from 8% during the French rule).[752] After 1973, Alawis increased to 12%, while Sunni Syrians were still the majority, but reduced to 77.4%.[753] The rise of Assad did not lead to an increase in the numerical participation of Christians in Parliament, with their proportion still below the threshold of 10% as it was in 1961. Conduit reports that in Homs, where the rebellion started in March 2011, "Bashar appointed one of his closest friends as governor of the province, indicating an attempt to engage the Syrian Sunni community beyond Damascus".[754] This was not sufficient to prevent the opposition.

6.3 Sectarianisation and its effects on diasporas in Armenia and Australia

The regime's sectarian card

After what activists call the "Syrian revolution" in 2011, Bashar al-Assad has driven attention towards the sectarian nature of the opposition. Many argue that he has followed a sectarian agenda[755] for maintaining the support of minorities and counting on the power of his foreign allies, Russia and Iran, above all. Support for the regime in the Syrian war comes from Shia-ruled actors like Iran and Hezbollah. In addition, in order to justify the Russian involvement in Syria, the Russian president has often referred to the protection of orthodox communities in Syria. [756] An important exception is represented by the coalition with Sunni Hamas, which is not defined in sectarian terms. [757] In the conflict, Sunni Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar backed rebels. [758] Both the regime and the rebels accepted "help from actors with ethno-

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[751] Seale in Antoun and Quataert (1991), p. 97.
[752] Hourani (1983), table 4.
[753] Hourani (1983), table 4.
[754] Conduit (2017), p. 83.
[755] See also Hashemi and Postel (2013).
[756] "Russia, Iran oppose foreign intervention in Syria". (2012, February 22). *Xinhua News Agency*, p. Xinhua News Agency.
[757] Anderson (2006), p. 37.
[758] Conduit (2017), p. 79.

sectarian agendas" when necessary.[759]

As Khatib points out, the sectarianisation of the conflict is an authoritarian divisive strategy for mechanisms of power:

> The sectarianization of the conflict in Syria started with the different regimes' realization that only a divisive strategy through which political elites seize control of the emerging political discourse and redraw the boundaries of political activism can safeguard their power.[760]

Pierret claims that in Syria "the radicalization was a direct by-product of the Assad regime's decision to use its full military might against rebellious cities", and the "sectarian massacres targeting Sunni civilians enhanced the process of radicalization".[761] Andrew Phillips contends that Bashar al-Assad's reaction against protesters included the sectarian card:

> Initially, as the first protests took place, the regime revived the old "fears of sectarianism" card. The opposition was characterized in state media as sectarian Islamists. Alawis in particular were targeted for manipulation, with Shabiha delivering sandbags to Alawi villages, claiming that neighboring Sunnis were on the rampage.[762]

The "fear of sectarianism" is a strategy that describes opponents as sectarian to justify the repression. In a 2011 speech, Bashar al-Assad states:

> They invoked detestable sectarian discourse which we have never endorsed and in which we only see an expression of a hateful ideology which has never been part of our religion, history or traditions and which has been an anathema and a sacrilege to our national, pan-Arab and moral identity. In all these issues, and with the exception of the first component, I am talking about a small minority, which constitutes only a very small part of the Syrian people.[763]

The pronoun "they" refers to protesters, representing a "minority' of the Syrian population. This is an exemplar of reversal of the minority/majority issue and of sectarianism as belonging to a restricted section of population, losing religious value. Pan-Arab ideology is still important, representing a counterpart to sectarianism. Bashar al-Assad in his speech characterised the protest movement as a "sectarian sedition" that aims to destroy stability and spread chaos. It was clear in his speech that the regime is very interested in spreading fear about sectarian strife, as proof that the regime is the only form capable of preserving safety, stability and unity in Syria.

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[759] Anderson (2006), p. 360.

[760] Khatib, L. (2017). "Syria, Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E. and Qatar: The 'sectarianization' of the Syrian conflict and undermining of democratization in the region." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies,* pp. 1-19, p. 3.

[761] Pierret in Hashemi and Postel*,* (2013), p. 247.

[762] Phillips, A. (2014). "The Islamic State's challenge to international order." *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 68 (5), 495-98, p. 496.

[763] Bashar al-Assad, 30 March 2011.

The use of the fear-of-sectarianism card represents a self-fulfilling prophecy on sectarian divisions. In a more recent speech in 2016, the Syrian president returns to sectarianism: "The sectarian systems turn the people of a homeland to enemies, thereby colonialist countries introduce themselves as a protector to certain groups inside this homeland".[764] The fulfilment of the prophecy is evident in the description of a once united homeland and now divided country. Sectarianism is now conceived as external forces having internal consequences.

The sectarianisation of the conflict and the Islamisation of the opposition

As Rafiq Jouejati points out, in Syria the loss of political authority has ended in the sectarian use of force.[765] Sectarianism is the tool for mobilising groups through ethnic and religious lines. In the Syrian conflict, divide and rule strategies became necessary to maintain power against different armed groups fighting in Syria against pro-Assad forces. On both sides, not all groups are openly sectarian, with some of them outside sectarian constraints. There are nine different militias fighting the Syrian army and their allies. Three are openly sectarian: al-Qaeda backed Jubhat al-Nusra, ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) and "Jaysh al-Sunna" (or Sunni army). Among the regime's internal allies, there are Shia groups like "Jaysh al-Muwahidden" ('army of Unitarians') representing the Druze community and "al-Jihesh" tribe militias[766].

Apart from these groups, it is not possible to find a unique sectarian political line. Not all Christian groups support Assad, and not all Sunnis fight for the fall of the regime. In particular, moderate and secular political groups like the Arab Nationalist Guard and "Ghuraba al-Sham" wishing to establish a non-religious government in Syria sympathise with the regime.[767] Other moderate and secular groups are non-Islamist but support the rebels: the Hazzm movement had an alliance with the Free Syrian Army; the Northern Storm Brigade is formed around the Syrian upper class. Likewise, not all Sunni Syrians oppose the regime. As Khatib notes, Sunni pro-Assad militias are the Quds brigade, the Ba'th Brigades and the National Defense Forces, and "the majority of the Shabiha militias in Aleppo, Deir ez-Zor and the Eastern

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[764] Bashar al-Assad, 7 June 2016.
[765] Jouejati in Hashemi and Postel (2013), p. 176.
[766] Rafizadeh (2015).
[767] Rafizadeh (2015), p. 32.

governorates are generally Sunnis".[768]

Anti-Assad Christian political groups include Syriac Union Party and Suturo, requesting protection for Christians despite Assad. [769] The former is exclusively Syriac, while the latter also has non-Syriac Christian members. Within them, the Assyrian Democratic Party supports the regime.[770] The composition of the groups is not univocally sectarian and sectarian alignments do not always dictate political support.

As Ignatieff points out, in an almost Hobbesian context in Syria ("fighters regard each other with suspicion"), identity becomes salient and Islamist fighters took advantage of it for "the dream of the creation of an Islamic Caliphate in the Arab lands". [771] Byman argues that sectarianism is an important element of Sunni Salafi extremist propaganda and its power of attraction all across the world: "Sunni fighters are likewise flocking to Syria, driven in large part by a sectarian message that their community is under attack from an apostate regime".[772] Most of them joined Islamic State groups. Byman stresses, "some groups in Syria have parroted sectarian rhetoric for instrumental reasons", becoming even "more extreme in their sectarian orientation".[773] This dynamic reaffirms the thesis that the politicisation of sectarian feelings leads to violent outcomes. In other words, sectarianism alone is not the leading factor in the dissent, but rather political interests exploit sectarian feeling. The sectarian terrain for the politicisation of group feelings existed in different historical contexts, and it was not invented during the initial civil unrest. Rather, following the constructivist perspective, it was reinvented after the conflict, as a product of violent escalations.

The paradox is shown by groups like ISIS claiming to represent a solution to sectarianism in their fight against religious heterogeneity. They denounce sectarianism and exploit sectarian feelings, at the same time, in order to fulfil their political dream of a religiously homogenous Islamic State. In a statement to the people and the fighters of ISIS, published by the journal of ISIS "Dabiq", the official spokesman of ISIS concludes:

> Thereafter know that a trial, sifting, and selection, are necessary between a period and

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[768] Khatib (2017), p. 5.
[769] Rafizadeh (2015), p. 34.
[770] Al-Tamimi (2012).
[771] Ignatieff in in Hashemi and Postel (2013), p. 48.
[772] Byman (2014), p. 93.
[773] Byman (2014), p. 94.

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another, for some people who have entered your ranks who are not of you and are only claimants. And thus some disorder has occurred, expel the filth and purify the ranks.[774]

The exclusivist nature of ISIS's propaganda and the sacred value of its message of purification emerge. The result is the creation of an illusion of homogeneity within a heterogeneous country like Syria. This illusion has two dangerous implications. Firstly, as Connor warns, the myth of unity does not always engender harmony in reality, but it could actuate division.[775]

Sectarian violence creates victims on both sides in return. Christopher Phillips outlines that churches and Sunni mosques, Alawi and Sunni families have been attacked; ethnic cleansing of many ethnic groups in both regime and rebel held cities was perpetrated.[776] The next chapter on secularism and Islamism shows there is heterogeneity, even between the Islamic State groups in Syria, which have different approaches for the implementation of the Islamic State. To fulfil their dream, they have to manage the pre-existing heterogeneous population in the Syrian territories occupied by them.[777] Their literal interpretation of the Quran in their imagined return to the foundational Islamic Caliphate[778] leads them to apply the formula "convert or leave with a tax or die", with all the inhumane consequences of ethnic cleansing and refugee humanitarian catastrophe.[779]

Effects of sectarian polarisation on diaspora

The in-depth interviews confirmed the sectarianisation of the conflict has also had an impact on the Syrian diaspora. In Armenia, all participants reported that they were worried about the creation of an Islamic State in Syria that would undermine their possibility of resettling in Syria.[780] The saliency of pre-existing religious loyalties amongst people with Syrian descent in Australia emerges as a reflex. The president of Australian Syrian Relief Society, under the umbrella of the Syrian Australian Association, said: *"The religious composition of our association is mostly Sunni Muslim, because the Christians, the Assyrians and the Armenians have their own*

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[774] https://archive.org/details/dabiieq004
[775] Connor (1994), p. 140.
[776] Phillips (2014), p. 358.
[777] For instance, ISIS in Syria controls the area starting from al-Raqqah to the border with Iraq.
[778] For more details see also Wood (2015).
[779] ISIS's approach contradicts the "Qur'anic command of tolerance". See also Said and Sharify-Funk (2003), p. 23.
[780] Survey results.

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communities". A member of the Alawi Association of Sydney said that he maintains the link with Syria and Syrian culture, but avoids taking part in Syrian Australian associations.

The political polarisation of Syrian groups, mostly Sunni and Christians, which emerged from Chapter 4, is interpreted as a combined effect of the multicultural structure of Australian society and of the sectarianisation of the conflict in Syria. Representatives of Syrian Australian associations pointed out that their composition is mostly Sunni because other groups like Armenians and Assyrians found their own associations that were already established in Australia. [781] The political division between pro-Assad and pro-opposition groups that characterises the Syrian Australian diaspora also became religious between Sunni and Christian Syrians. An Australian-born Syrian Christian interviewee said:

> *I used to have a Syrian community association, but then I quit because I do not trust Sunni Muslims anymore. Once ISIS and al-Nusra started killing or kicking out Christians, we are scared. Our fears are raised after ISIS took some villages around Der'a. I still have properties in Syria. Some of them are damaged. I was running a high school there, with 90% Christians. Then, they took it. They took its name. It is okay, they can take it, but they do not know that the people and not the names make the community.*

A Sunni participant in Sydney explicitly referred to the sectarianisation of Syria after the conflict complaining about the Shia-led resistance: "*Damascus is becoming a Shia like city, where many Iranian and other Shia immigrants were granted Syrian identity card and citizenship. They are building their places of cult. They are changing the demographic composition of Syria*".[782]

The war in Syria also had impacts on Syrians' feeling of belonging. An active member of the Australian Armenian community in Sydney working with the immigration department to help Syrian refugees with Armenian descent said: "*My sense of belonging changed after the war in Syria. Before I used to feel that I belonged to Syria, but then this is not the case for me and more importantly for my kids*". Despite the polarisation of views, a common feature of the responses is that they identify sectarianism as a political force exacerbated after the conflict rather than

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[781] Miscellaneous interviews.
[782] Interview, participant 1, Sydney.

as a social factor. Sectarianism was interpreted as an internal issue, in connection to corruption, by a participant who said: *"The best way to deal with problems such as corruption is for all parties to sit at the dialogue table and give opinions with full transparency and sincerity, without sectarian discrimination".*[783] A Syrian Armenian interviewee in Yerevan said: *"I could be an independent and emancipated woman in Syria, but now do not want to live in an Arab country any more. For them, the sectarian dimension has become more and more important. I want my life back and my freedom".*[784]

This is also shown by the definitions of the conflict given in the survey. The definition "sectarian violence" had a low incidence in both the Armenian and Australian case studies.[785] In Armenia, more than a third of respondents defined the conflict as an "external invasion", while in Australia, two thirds defined it as an "international conflict". Sectarianism is felt by Australian and Armenian diasporans to be a serious issue in Syria, but it is not considered as the root of the conflict. In the survey, the definition "sectarian" for the regime occurred in rare cases. In Armenia, 10% of participants strongly disagreed with the use of this definition, while 6% agreed. In Australia, only two participants agreed. A former Syrian consul in Sydney said: *"Syria has never been sectarian"*. A member of the Alawi community of Sydney shared this view: *"In Syria it doesn't matter if you are Jewish, Christian or Muslim, Sunni or Shia"*. Another respondent said: *"Syrians believe in Syria, regardless of any ethnic or sectarian issues"*. [786] These responses support theoretical views of sectarianism as an effect and not as a cause of strife in Syria.

Sectarianism as a source of political organisation in post-war Syria

Interviewees expressed concern that the resolution to the Syrian conflict would lead to the fragmentation of Syrian into different states. One said: *"In the future, I see many different Syrias; the future of the zone will no longer be Syria. They want to create all religious states after the State of Israel, a fully recognized Jewish State".*[787] Another predicted:

> *The future will tell, if Syria was divided into different region, that would be*

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[783] Interview, participant 7, Melbourne.
[784] Interview, participant 1, Yerevan.
[785] Survey results.
[786] Interview, participant 5, Melbourne.
[787] Interview, participant 3, Sydney.

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a very sad but most likely outcome. Maybe the new Syria will be divided into territories: the east to al-Assad, the north (Hassaki) to the Kurds, part of Damascus with central territories to the Sunni. The regime started talking about religion after the uprising.

In the Australian case study 54% of participants reported in the survey that while Syria before the war was a "strong state", after the war it has been transformed into "a mix of territories".[788]

The sectarian breakup of the Syrian conflict that turned into an internal armed conflict has led to thoughts about the replicability of the Lebanese Taif Agreement (1989) in Syria. The agreement foresaw a power sharing formula closed to a pure consociational democracy, with a fixed-parity quorum of 50% Christians and 50% Muslims.[789] Rosiny notes that the agreement in 1989 replaced, and improved, the former one that did not take into account the democratic modifications of the country. Rosiny explains: "The Taif accord helped end the fighting between the Lebanese militias, but it ultimately failed to create a stable state and integrate the different communities into a united national entity".[790] Even though the formula did not lead to political stability, Rosiny sees it as the only suitable option for the post-war Syria in order to avoid the risks of fragmentation. Is there a base for consociational power sharing in Syria?

Despite historical commonalities on the politicisation of ethnic and religious groups and the similarities in the sectarian escalation of the civil war, Syria and Lebanon are politically very different. There are two major differences between them that make the replicability of the Taif system in Syria doubtful: firstly, the minority-rule [791] Syrian regime in a Sunni majority country, unlike Lebanon where the Maronite, Sunni and Shia communities are relatively better balanced numerically[792]; and secondly, the absence of an established consociational system before the civil war but rather the presence of a secular regime in Syria, unlike Lebanon where the Taif Agreement of 1989 was a modification of a previously agreed power sharing so that it did not represent a completely new political organisation.

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[788] Survey results.
[789] Rosiny (2013), p. 47.
[790] Rosiny (2013), p. 46.
[791] See next Chapter.
[792] Gärde, J. (2012). "Patterns of religiosity among Sunnis, Shias, and Christians in Lebanon's multi-confessional context." *Middle East Critique*, 21 (3), 1-18.

In addition, while community-based solidarity prevailed in Lebanon with the acquiescence of the state, in Syria "socio-religious solidarity networks were diluted by the state", as Rosiny suggests.[793] However, he also correctly notes that both the Lebanese and the Syrian systems share the presence of nepotism, corruption and clientelism that strengthens communal solidarity.[794] While this is generally true, the proposition of power sharing for resolving state corruption implies that the cause of a malfunctioning system is turned into its solution.

Another assumption is that communal or sectarian solidarity cannot coexist with non-sectarian forms of a welfare state. Rosiny notes: "the lack of state protection and a welfare system allowed community-based party militias to resume their patronage networks".[795] Even though similar results of the reversal of welfare state functions into religious-based organisations also took place in Syria, the pathway was different. Whereas in Lebanon it was the result of "laissez-faire state granted a great deal of autonomy to its sub-national communities"[796], in Syria it was the outcome of a tacit agreement of the state with some religious minorities in exchange for political acquiescence, as noted in the next chapter.

Lebanon-like consociational agreements also need extremely stable groups (where conventions to other religions and intermarriages do not take place); otherwise, like Lebanon, there is a division of power representing how group numbers were distributed at a point frozen in the past, which may, over time, become inequitable. Also, such arrangements tend to assume that everyone identifies exclusively with a single group, whereas international evidence suggests that as societies modernise, religious and other identities become much more fluid.

Group solidarity is instead theoretically compatible with national solidarity. Christopher Phillips also clarifies that political alignment based on sub-state ties can coexist with nation building.[797] A similar point is made by Durkheim, not having religious groups in mind but rather trade guilds and similar sub-national associations, which, according to him, were not antithetical to but, on the contrary, constituent of a strong state.[798]

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[793] Rosiny (2013), p. 43.
[794] Rosiny (2013).
[795] Rosiny (2013), p. 44.
[796] Rosiny (2013).
[797] Phillips, C. (2015). "Sectarianism and conflict in Syria." *Third World Quarterly,* 36 (2), 357-376, p. 358.
[798] Durkheim (1995).

The circumstances of the war in Syria are also obviously different from the Lebanese civil war. Most importantly, Lebanon did not have the Salafi component with its political goal of the Islamic State and the Caliphate. A sectarian solution might reinforce sectarian grievances from extremist groups in the long term. Ultimately, the Syrian diaspora with emigration, migration from outside and a portion of internal migration[799] will leave the demographic configuration of Syrian deeply transformed. It is difficult to predict how many Syrian refugees will return to Syria and their ethno-religious composition, and how many outsiders will leave Syria. Above all, this would make an immediate power sharing soon after the end of the conflict unrepresentative of the future demographic composition of Syria.

As a consequence, while it is possible to draw comparisons between Syria and Lebanon, it is unlikely that a power-sharing system would represent a permanent political solution in Syria. The other imminent possible resolutions are not more definitive. Syria could be fragmented into different sectarian statelets, something that is "taboo for many Syrian nationalists".[800] It is unlikely that the division of Syria would reflect the aspirations of Syrian groups that, despite political divisions, sustain the need for "*a united and strong Syria*".[801]

6.4 Sectarianism and humanity

Having determined that sectarianism is a political instrument for mobilising Syrian identity, the impact of sectarianism on group solidarity in diaspora is now considered. The other side of sectarianism is its solidarity-generating effects that are mostly originated from below and underneath state narratives. In politically unstable contexts, people prefer the traditional reassurance associated with "sectarian feeling".[802] In the "natural state of peril" and insecurity, the positivity of group feeling emerges as providing for basic "human needs" and the defence of the existence itself of the group.[803]

Without the feeling of ᶜ*aṣabiyya* deriving from sectarian identity, certain groups would be extinguished. Especially in times of war, religious groups in the Middle East

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[799] Mostly towards the territories held by the regime or by the Islamic State. More details are provided in the next chapter.
[800] Rosiny (2013), p. 49.
[801] Miscellaneous interviews. See also Chapter 3.
[802] Gawharii, M. et al. (2008). *Ibn Khaldun: 'injāz fikrī mutajaddid [in Arabic: 'Ibn Khaldun: making a new thought real}*. Al-Iskandariiyya: Maktabat al-Iskandariyya.
[803] Gawharii et al. (2008).

provide for the difficulties faced by the national and international systems to be responsible for humanitarian assistance and intervention. As also testified by Tahir Zaman, in the Syrian context of "protection impasse" with "minimal operations" of the UN and the UNHCR, faith based organisations are the most active in humanitarian support.[804]

Zaman mentions the "Family Association of Syrian Fraternity" linked to the Syrian Orthodox Church, Sufi based "Jam'eeyat al-Ansaar al-Khayriya", a "charity based at Kaftaro", and Islamic charitable associations like the "Union of Charitable Associations in Damascus, "a network of predominantly Sunni organisations coordinating welfare activities in the city".[805] The system also has a reflection in host countries such as Australia and Armenia. In Armenia, humanitarian assistance is predominately based on ethnic and religious solidarity.

Flanigan's study of religion in conflict focuses on the double nature of religious groups' belief as enforcing violence and division and "motivating humanitarian relief" as well.[806] She also refers to the example of Sectarian Social Welfare in Lebanon as a proof of social benefits provided by the sectarian membership. From her interviews with staff members of both faith-based organisations and secular NGOs in Lebanon, the "sectarian structure" of humanitarianism emerges: "In a context of sectarian warfare, belonging to a sect that has resources to protect one's family from physical harm is of obvious consequence".[807] Even if the situation is Syria is different from that in Lebanon, it is likely that in the "desert of Tartars" of the Syrian conflict, the sectarian dimension plays an important role in humanitarian assistance.

In her context, Flanigan also refers to Armenian NGOs for "service provision" and the "desire to preserve ethnic identity.[808] In the case of Armenians, the ethnic identity almost perfectly coincides with the religious one (with the exception of the distinction between Catholic and Apostolic Armenians), and the mention of Armenians in sectarian social services is not surprising. Flanigan explains the case of Armenians fits along sectarian lines, because they "provide services almost exclusively to Armenians" and "service provision becomes exclusive and structured

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[804] Zaman, T. (2012). "Jockeying for position in the humanitarian field: Iraqi refugees and faith-based organizations in Damascus". *Disasters,* 36 (1), 126-148.
[805] Zaman (2012), p. 134.
[806] Flanigan, S. T. (2010). *For the love of God: NGOS and religious identity in a violent world.* Sterling: Kumarian Press.
[807] Flanigan (2010), p. 37.
[808] Flanigan (2010), p. 39.

along ethnic lines".[809] On the whole, Flanigan's opinion of sectarianism is negative, probably because of this exclusivism. However, to propose an alternative might be extremely difficult, especially when sectarian assistance is the first available as in the Syrian conflict. The human side of sectarianism also plays a role in the strengthening of religious group feelings inside and outside Syria.

As Flanigan points out, the Armenians are a perfect example of the intersection between religion and ethnicity in the formation or consolidation of group solidarity.[810] The influence of the past persecution on Armenian identity makes them united in a "nation under God".[811] Also, because of its ethno-religious nature, Flanigan appropriately defines service provision by Armenian NGOs in Lebanon during the civil war (1975–1991) as sectarian. The results of her study on Armenian service provision in Lebanon are useful for evaluating Syrian Armenian service provision in Armenia, although the Lebanese context of sectarian power-sharing is evidently different from the Syrian and the Armenian contexts described so far.

Three results of Flanigan's analysis are recurrent in Armenian provision in general and are valid for the case of this thesis: its exclusivity to Armenian people, being influenced by the Genocide, and non-direct involvement and political neutrality in the events of the Lebanese civil war. One of her participants said that Armenian political parties did not support the Christian party in the civil war, something that attracted the sympathies of the Muslim sides towards Armenians.[812] As Flanigan notes, the past mass deportation and the experience of the Genocide is more influential for Armenian identity than the events of the civil war.[813]

Like Armenian Lebanese, Syrian Armenians remained neutral in the Syrian conflict. However, unlike in the Lebanese case where the divisions of the civil war did not impact Armenian community identity according to Flanigan's findings[814], the experience of the second diaspora provoked a form of reconstruction of the Armenian community in Armenia. In some cases, Syrian Armenians saw in the violence of the Syrian conflict the replication of the Armenian Genocide, as outlined in Chapter 4. The two case studies in Armenia and Australia have different outcomes on the effects of exile on Syrian Armenians.

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[809] Flanigan (2010), p. 46.
[810] Flanigan (2010), p. 39.
[811] Flanigan (2010).
[812] Flanigan (2010).
[813] Flanigan (2010), p. 40.
[814] Flanigan (2010), p. 41.

In Australia, the presence of an established Armenian community in Sydney and Melbourne made them converge towards the members of their community first, starting from the immigration process. A representative of the Armenian community of Sydney said they implemented a special immigration scheme for Syrian Armenians through the Armenian Church.[815] On the community she said: *"Every week we have an event for Syrian Armenians. At the church, they socialise and stay together"*.

In Armenia, a form of distinctiveness of the Armenian community of Aleppo is also emerging with the re-creation of the association linked to the Armenian school that once operated in Aleppo. From social observation undertaken during their social events, community solidarity was the most important factor since every event had the principal scope of raising funds for Armenians still in Syria. In the assembly, members talked about the past in Syria and also discussed the struggles that conationals had to face after the conflict. This included sensitive matters such as deaths, kidnapping and violence that could not be further investigated due to ethical research concerns.

The Assyrian and the Alawi communities of Sydney also implemented solidarity and assistance networks for members of the community still in Syria or in Australia. In the survey question that asked about the feeling for the community, the response "solidarity" was most common. In many cases, solidarity was selected together with another option "help members of my community before others".[816]

On the other hand, the ethnic and religious solidarity implemented through the last repatriation to Armenia resulted in bittersweet feelings and disillusion for Syrian Armenians that made them re-consider the importance of the community. Surprisingly, they indicated spiritual (many wrote "religion", "history", "traditions" and culture" as attributes of the community) and material links associated with belonging to the community.[817] Armenia accepted refugees from Syria as a form of return to the ethnic homeland on the basis of religion, since a certificate of baptism was required as a requisite.[818] This peculiar case of religious and ethnic solidarity in the migration process did not correspond to humanitarian assistance in Armenia, as noted in Chapter 4. When asked about the feeling for and the paybacks from the community, many Syrian Armenians in Armenia responded with "the same as for all

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[815] Interview, participant 4, Sydney.
[816] Survey results.
[817] Survey results.
[818] Miscellaneous interviews.

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human beings" (14 of the 42 respondents) or wrote down "nothing at all" (12 of the 42). This suggests that even group solidarity strictly depends on the context in which it is implemented and cannot be taken for granted as stable.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has been founded on a more neutral classification of sectarianism, which includes both violent outcomes and humanitarian actions. The modern story of sectarian outbreaks in the formation of the Syrian nation-state shapes the memories of Syrian diasporans. It is important to understand the events that they recalled and the role played by sectarianism, to bring state narratives and formulations from below together and make them productively interact. Rather than referring to historical continuity[819] of sectarianism in Syria, phases of sectarian struggle should be used. Seen this way, sectarianism goes beyond the dichotomy between historical determinism, which looks at historical legacy of sectarianism as a constant, and cultural essentialism that considers sectarian strife as the product of contrasting primordial loyalties.

In situations of state-collapse as in Syria, sectarian identity becomes salient for a range of outcomes, from humanitarian assistance to the dictation of political claims. The saliency of sectarian attachments, despite all the negative acquisitions attributed to it in theory, is not *per se* conflict-generating. The politicisation of sectarianism is not the consequence of a "strong group feeling", but rather of the loss of legitimate authority, resulting from a weak group feeling in the ruling class.

Sectarianism in Syria is at the same time deployed and exploited by both the regime and the Islamist fringe of the opposition to mobilise groups on an ethnic and religious basis, and to maintain or gain support. The result is the radicalisation of political sentiments on the basis of religion, with an exacerbation of the use of the force. Violence turns out as *tawahush* or brutality, which, in return, produces fears and religious antagonism. The societal roots of sectarian prejudice that make political exploitation of sectarian feelings possible should not be ignored. It will be possible to evaluate them only when Syria is again accessible for social research.

Christopher Phillips points out that Syrian political identity is more complex than what emerges from the sectarian discourse. There is a degree of simplification of

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[819] Osman (2014). "Endurance" (*daīmūma*) of sectarianism.

Syrian political identity emerging from the fieldwork with Syrian Australians and Armenians, which is due to the diasporic dimension of this study. The major complexity in the study of Syrian political identity outside Syria consists of an apparent incoherence between the assertions of sectarian harmony amongst Syrian groups and that of political divisions formulated upon sectarian lines in diaspora. In practice, sectarian polarisation is reflected in the Syrian diaspora in Australia, with divisions and antagonism between groups in which "the sects versus Sunni" paradigm drives political attitudes. As the cases of Syrian groups in Armenia and Australia demonstrate, religious tension amongst Syrian groups is due to the politicisation of sectarian identity in Syria and abroad.

The other side of sectarianisation exists in the operations of relief and humanitarianism during the conflict. In the "protection impasse" in Syrian warfare, faith based organisations with a sectarian background, both Christian (Armenian, Syrian Orthodox) and Islamic (Sufi, Shia and Sunni), are the most active in humanitarian assistance. This is also replicated in the Syrian diasporas of Armenia and Australia, where ethnic and religious solidarity was dominant.

The replication of both sectarian antagonism and solidarity in the case studies, especially in Australia, confirms the double connotation of sectarianism. It also seemingly contrasts with the results of the previous two chapters on the formation of a Syrian national identity in diaspora. It is evident, however, that the sectarian polarisation is a situational effect of the current conflict that might be overcome once national dialogue is restored in Syria. The results in Chapter 5 indicated that religious and ethnic attachments do not necessarily obstruct national belonging in the long term.

The following chapter evaluates the revival of religious group feelings more in depth as a result of discrimination created by the use of secular politics by the regime. It becomes more evident that mobilisation around identity is a response to political and social disadvantage.

Chapter 7. Secularisation and Islamisation in Syria versus secularity and religiosity in diaspora

7.1 Introduction

The sectarianisation of the Syrian conflict raises concerns about the secular identity of Syria, which is widely considered the most secular of the Arab countries, and the "last fortress of secularism in the Middle East" according to Bashar al-Assad in 2015.[820] The Syrian nation-state has a long secular tradition[821] that influences national political identity. In more recent times, scholarly attention has also been given to the revival of political Islam in Syria, as a form of political opposition whose goal is to subvert Syrian secularism.[822] Secularism and political Islam are two contrasting political discourses currently occurring in a way that is important for the future of Syria. In opposite ways, both wish to dictate what being Syrian means, or, more accurately, to politicise what being religious in Syria means.

How do religion and the secular function together to define Syrian identity in diaspora? This chapter argues that secularism and religion are mutually sustaining and sustain Syrian identity. Beyond the conception of religion and secularism as two separate entities, this thesis follows the well-established notion of religious and secular beliefs as overlapping discursive factors.[823] Syrian secularism often re-incorporates religious commitments.

In the light of the "symbiotic link" between the religious and the secular[824], this chapter examines secularism both as an instrument of the Syrian state for managing religious diversity and as a category of practice functioning for religious coexistence in everyday life. Unlike its ideological counterpart, sectarianism, which is only mentioned as a mere political tool in Syria, secularism is perceived as permeating and shaping the interests of the Syrian population in diaspora.

The secular discourse, then, should not be considered merely as a tool for

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[820] Bashar al-Assad's propaganda uses secularism in many circumstances such as "Assad's recent lie: 'I am secularism's last fortress" (*Al-Arabiya*, 8 May 2015) http://english.alarabiya.net/views/2013/03/05/269716.html

[821] Khatib, L. (2011). *Islamic revivalism in Syria: The rise and fall of Ba'thist secularism*. London: Routledge.

[822] Khatib, H. (2015). "Political instrumentalization of Islam in a violent State crisis: The case of Syria". *Journal of Applied Security Research,* 10 (3), 341-361.

[823] Mahmood, S. (2012). "Religious freedom, the minority question, and geopolitics in the Middle East". *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* 54 (2), 418-446, p. 421.

[824] Herriot, P. (2007). *Religious fundamentalism and social identity.* East Sussex ; New York: Routledge.

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politicising identity, but instead as part of the production of the identitarian feelings that shape what being Syrian means. Formulations of secularity and religiosity articulated by Syrian diasporans are not in contrast with each other. Religiosity might or might not be coincident with the way being secular is dictated by the Syrian regime. The investigation of popular secularism in the diaspora shows that diasporans developed their own secular formulas that do not always correspond to state-sponsored secularism.

7.2 Authoritarian secularism in Syria versus civil secularism in diaspora

Secularism, religion and nationalism

Secularism, secularisation and secularity are terms that all refer to the conceptualisation of the decline of religion in the public sphere. But despite the similarities they have subtly different denotations. Secularism stands for the ideological legitimation of the institutional separation between religion and the state, while secularisation is used for the progressive nature of religious decline and the privatisation of religion.[825] As Talal Asad points out, secularity is a less studied but broader and more inclusive notion, which refers to how secular values are manifested in civil society as social, cultural and symbolic arrangements of differentiation between religious and other social and political realms.[826]

There are different sub-meanings and interpretations of the three terms according to the context. There are degrees of secularism, secularisation and secularity in a given society. The aim is to understand how the three notions are formulated in Syria and whether there is a replication for the crafting of Syrian national identity in the diaspora. Particular interest is given to secularity as a secular discourse from below. As such, it cannot be separated from its counterpart, religiosity. Saba Mahmood's explanation of the secular is particularly relevant: "The secular is not the natural bedrock from which religion emerges, nor what remains if religion is taken away".[827] Secularism and religion are not incompatible; rather, often the two are simultaneously evident in the functioning of religious diversity.

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[825] Taylor, C. (2007). *A secular age*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
[826] Asad (1993).
[827] Mahmood (2012), p. 422.

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Edward Said notably made a similar point: "Old religious patterns of human history and destiny" are not simply removed, they are "redeployed in the secular frameworks". [828] The interdependency between religion and the secular is also accurately explained by Anidjar: "The two terms, *religious* and *secular,* are therefore not masks *for* one another. Rather, they function together as covers, strategic devices and mechanisms of obfuscation and self-blinding". [829]

This chapter explores the interdependence of secularism and religion and the extent to which it shapes Syrian national identity. Drawing on the theoretical framework on the interdependence between the two categories of religion and the secular, religion and the secular need to be recognised as existing in a complex relation to each other, as interchangeable tools for the politicisation of Syrian identity. Of particular interest is Mahmood's definition of the role of secular governance in shaping political identities and national belongings in which secularism entails "a form of national-political structuration organized around religious differences". [830] The secularist division between religion and politics is a form of political authority that drives national identification. [831]

Secularism can be one of the ideologies embraced by the state for shaping national belonging through the de-politicisation of religion and its relegation to the private sphere. Religion is an equally important factor for national mobilisation. As Kim and Kollontai argue, despite the secular prediction of the decreasing role of religion in society [832], community religion is still a "vital source" for individual and social identification. [833] Religion still "influences or is suppressed by governments, inflames or mediates conflicts, shapes voter attitudes and political cultures, and so on". [834] Likewise, contrary to the interpretation of the rise of religious nationalisms as the consequence of the decline of secular nationalism [835], revival of religion in the national discourse does not always mean the "death of the secular" as a reversal of the

[828] Said, E. W. (1995). *Orientalism*. London: Penguin.
[829] Anidjar, G. (2006). "Secularism". *Critical Inquiry,* 33 (1), 52-77, p. 61.
[830] Mahmood (2012), p. 410.
[831] Hurd, E. (2008). *The politics of secularism in international relations.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.
[832] Durkheim, Spencer, Weber, Marx and Rousseau are secular thinkers who predicted the eventual expungement of religion from social life.
[833] Kim and Kollontai (2007), p. 107.
[834] Maddox, M. (2014). "Finding God in global politics". *International Political Science Review,* 12 (1), 185-196, p. 185.
[835] Juergensmeyer, M. (1993). *The new Cold War?: Religious nationalism confronts the secular state.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

secular motto "death of religion". Saliency of religious feelings can occur in periods of strong secularism. It might also be that national religious mobilisation is not intended to undermine national secularity.

Secular tradition in Syria

Religion is most likely to drive national mobilisation where the religion of the rulers differs from the religion of the majority.[836] Syrian minority rule fits in this framework. Nevertheless, Syria has a long secular tradition that has mainly functioned to address its rich religious diversity. The nature of sectarianism in Syria in the previous chapter is also valid for secularism: it is the lack of legitimation in secular power that leads to political mobilisation around religious feelings.

As Mahmood puts it, entrenchment of religious identity in politics is the "product of the enhancement of a secular political rationality that exacerbates the confessional divide".[837] Considering the co-presence of secular and religious elements is extremely useful for framing the secularisation of Syria, which started in the late Ottoman period. This chapter shows that the Syrian secular formula does not exclude but rather incorporates religion.

The co-presence of religious and secular values has been a constant in the formation of the modern Syrian state. The secular identity of the Syrian state has deep historical roots that were closely linked with the question of religion in the nation. Since the late Ottoman period, when laic intellectuals like al-Bustani defined in a secular way the need to eliminate religious attachments[838], the secular agenda of the Ottoman Empire did not seek to undermine the religious-political foundations of the Ottoman Caliphate.[839] As Fortna points out, despite the secularising logic of the Ottoman Empire during the *Tanzimat* reforms[840], "the state increasingly relied on the cooperation of the religious authorities".[841]

Ottoman religious authorities functioned as "intermediaries" between the millets

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[836] Martin, D. (1978). *The dilemmas of contemporary religion.* Oxford: Blackwell.
[837] Mahmood (2012), p. 87.
[838] Al-Bustani,
[839] Fortna, B. (2000). "Islamic morality in late Ottoman secular schools". *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* 32 (3), 369-393.
[840] Barkey and Gavrilis (2016), p. 27. The *Tanzimat* reforms between 1839 and 1876 gradually proclaimed equality in Ottoman matters regardless of religion and by 1869 non-Muslims were recognised as citizens of the empire with the same rights and obligations as Muslims.
[841] Fortna (2000), p. 371.

and the central administrations[842], in the sense that they integrated the matters of the autonomous community – family law, education, culture and religion – with the Ottoman Empire. In particular, they had to preside the internal disputes, protect their community and, at the same time, grant their loyalty to the imperial centre.[843] They were not always able to deploy their function, criticised in most of the literature on the millets as lacking credibility as intermediary figures and as overwhelmingly interested in bureaucratic matters.[844] Their role still shows the co-presence of secular and religious elements in the secularisation of late Ottoman Syria initiated with the *Tanzimat* reforms.

Afterwards, the Syrian nation-state took part in the secularisation of the Middle East sponsored by colonial rule. Many interpret secularism as a *divide et impera* strategy for colonial subjugation.[845] The constitution of 1930 (second Mandate) imposed divisions in the administrations of Syrian territories[846]: in the confessional system established by the French, a quarter of parliamentary seats were dedicated to religious groups.[847] Religion played an important role in the establishment of the constitution of 1930.

The constitution stated "freedom of religious observance and for the community schools"; but equality was not maintained at the executive power level with the prerequisite that "The President must be a Muslim".[848] Islam has never been officially recognised as the state religion, though. The path towards the presidential prerequisite had political opposition, and ended as a form of compromise between radicals pushing for complete Muslim pre-eminence and activists promoting complete religious equality, also within the Sunni majority. This was an important step in the definition of the identity of the newly formed Syrian nation-state. Again, the secular agenda and religious recognition were simultaneously at stake.

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[842] Fortna (2000), p. 375.
[843] Barkey and Gavrilis (2016), p. 36.
[844] See also Karpat (1982).
[845] Barkey and Gavrilis (2016), p. 36.
[846] While Article 2 stated unity and indivisibility of Syria as a political unity, the new version promulgated local autonomy of Druzes and Alawites, and Alexandretta as a separate Syrian province. The French reported the changes to the League of Nations as non-prejudicial to the unity of Syria.[846] However, the regionalisation of Syria created five autonomously administrated zones: Alawite (costal region) and Druze, Alexandretta, then ceded to Turkey, the city district (around Damascus) and Jazira.
[847] http://countrystudies.us/syria/20.htm. Precisely 35 out of 142 seats.
[848] Syrian constitution of 1928. See also http://www.syrianhistory.com/en/photos/2254?tag=documents;. The first version was rejected by the French, which accepted a late version. For this reason, some refer to it as the 1930 Constitution.

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After independence from the colonial rule (1946), despite secularism being seen as a legacy of the French mandates, political parties were still in favour of a secular Syria. The recognition of the majority's religion, Islam, was still problematic. The People's Party, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) and the Ba'ath Party, each with their own different programs[849], were involved in the religious dispute over the 1950 Constitution. The three were against the promulgation of Islam as the religion of the state, together with communists, leaders of Christian religious communities, influential secularist individuals and Muslim notables inclined towards a "religion-free state.[850]

The "Muslim Brethren" applied pressure for the recognition of Islam as the state religion. As Batatu explains, the "Muslim Brethren" started to take the shape of a political movement in 1950, with the general slogan of Islamic socialism that aimed to incorporate rules and prescripts of Islam into the state structure.[851] The 1950 Constitution represented a compromise once again, since Islam was proclaimed the religion of the President (in line with the 1930 Constitution), and of the majority of the Syrian population.[852]

With the emergence of the Ba'ath Party and al-Assad's regime, the secular question remained closely connected with the identity of the Syrian nation. As Khatib notes, the Ba'ath Party's ideology sought to abandon sectarian divide and promote a secular version of Arab nationalism.[853] The religious question became even more problematic under the minority rule, as discussed in the previous chapters. McCallum points out that despite the Ba'ath Party's stated goal was that of overcoming the Ottoman legacy of communal politics, state-church relationships in Syria still "function through a reinterpretation of the *millet* system".[854] Religious leaders, in fact, still deploy the function of intermediaries between spiritual and temporal matters.

The Syrian regime's "adaptation of *millet* approach", as McCallum calls it[855], comprises a social contract between Christian minorities and the secular state, in which religion retains a social but not political significance. The regime has

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[849] Mufti (2004), p. 67.
[850] Tibawi,(1969), p. 386.
[851] Batatu, H. (1982). "Syria's Muslim Brethren". *MERIP Reports,* 12 (9), 12-36, p. 12.
[852] Tibawi (1969), p. 387.
[853] Khatib, L. (2010). *Islamic and Islamist Revivalism in Syria: The Rise and Fall of Secularism in Ba'thist Syria.* Canada: McGill University, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, p. 31.
[854] McCallum, F. (2012). "Religious Institutions and Authoritarian States: Church–state relations in the Middle East." *Third World Quarterly,* 33(1), 109-124, p. 121.
[855] McCallum (2012), p. 121.

developed its own secular formula on the issue of religion in Syria, well explained by Altug:

> The Ba'ath rule after the Corrective Movement [1970], however, has tended to fine-tune the *difference* through culturalist sectarianism and the official discourse of harmony, i.e. a discourse of the harmonious coexistence of different faiths in the country. It tolerated "religious difference" as long as it was devoid of any political connotation and as long as public space is unstained by any kind of communal manifestation. Religious difference, then, is viewed as legitimate by the state as long as it is unpoliticized and culturalized, and as long as it is situated within self-defined and closed sects which stay unmixed with others.

Secularism in Syria implies the relegation of religious attachments to the cultural sphere and away from politics.

Secularism plays a fundamental role in the reformulation of identity politics by al-Assad's regime. As Mahmood notes, secularisation in Syria included "extending state recognition to religious groups".[856] The ideology included the conception of *Umma* (community of Muslims) in the secular sense, as the place where all Arabs share political and social interests, cultural and linguistic affinities, and a sense of a common destiny.[857]

Authoritarian secularism in Syria

Hinnebusch clarifies that the pay-off of groups in a divided society in Syria creates "an authority vacuum" that has been filled by "the rise of an authoritarian state".[858] This can explain the double secular and authoritarian nature of the Syrian regime[859], since secularism is a tool for potentially legitimising the minority rule, along with Arabism as seen in Chapter 5. Its legitimising role vanishes when secularism is an imposition from above and when the authoritarian rule, to quote directly from Hinnebusch, "never 'atomized' civil society, where family, religious and neighborhood solidarities retain their integrity".[860]

In Mahmood's view, the separation of the private and the public realms deriving from the secular formula is extremely problematic and leads to structural inequalities in the Middle East.[861] Conceived as a discursive operation of power, political

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[856] Khatib (2010), p. 63.
[857] Khatib (2010), p. 59.
[858] Khatib (2010), p. 255.
[859] McCallum (2012).
[860] Khatib (2010), p. 249.
[861] Mahmood, S. (2016). *Religious difference in a secular age: A minority report.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 32.

secularism has two major inconsistent features: the intervention of the state in the regulation of religious life and the production of inter-faith inequalities.[862] Following the theoretical framework in Chapter 3, political resurgence starts with the recognition of those inequalities and with "political contestation of the most fundamental contours and contents of the secular" and "dissatisfaction with the prevailing terms of the secularist settlement".[863]

In particular, differences were "tolerated",[864] but tolerance ended when any form of political opposition started. The regime becomes concerned with religious groups, under certain political conditions. Zaman notes that Article 26 of the NGO Law prohibits sectarian, racial or political activities that threaten the well being of the state (*salāmat al-dawla*).[865] Parallel to this is the repression of political movements formed around religion, especially when the regime feels exposed to political opposition. The clearest historical example of this for political Islam and Syrian Muslim Brotherhood was the repression of the Hama revolt in 1982.

Violence and coercion, use of force and bold repression, were direct methods adopted when soft power was ineffective, as in the Hama uprising. Khatib explains that, despite the formal victory against the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood[866], after Hama state-society relations were affected by the use of direct force and repression with the effect of "further disregard of secular principles".[867] In addition, in Altug's view, the inter-communal approaches attempted by some political groups were repressed by the state to maintain the sectarian balance.[868]

Under the mask of "sectarian balance" the defence against political Islam occurred when it represented a threat to the regime. As Hinnebusch explains, "Purges of mosques, religious associations, and professional syndicates eliminated these as bases of political opposition".[869] This policy produces ambiguity, and inequalities emerge, as Altug claims:

> The state closely monitors both the communities and the boundaries between the communities, so as to prevent the formation of a *common* and *oppositionary* political space crosscutting ethnicities and religions. Just as much as it harshly suppresses any

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[862] Mahmood (2016), p. 3.
[863] Hurd (2008), p. 130.
[864] Altug (2011), p. 84.
[865] Zaman (2012), p. 133.
[866] Conduit (2017), p. 84.
[867] Khatib (2010), p. 90.
[868] Khatib (2010), p. 82.
[869] Hinnebusch (1995), p. 249.

sort of oppositional political activity in Syria, the state also constantly checks any kind of communal formation transcending the limits of officially recognized ethno-religious categories.[870]

The regime was afraid of alliances between communities, something that could possibly mobilise into political opposition.

Following ethno-politics theories (see Chapter 3), the current Syria is a clear example of implicit use of religious identity in political matters. This is likely to imply a non-institutionalised prevalence of the ruling groups. The formal line in Syria is reducing the presence of religious and ethnic matters in Syrian politics, while informally favoring some groups. Religious freedom is closely linked with the autonomy of a certain ethno-religious group in Syria.

The government adopts the following logic: if the identity aspects (language, culture, tradition) of a certain group are necessary for the religious practice of the group, then they should be preserved.[871] This involves an informal preferred treatment that gives more autonomy of action (freedom to teach the language in schools, for instance) to the groups fitting this norm such as the Armenian community within the Syrian Christians. Since it practices religion in Armenian, it is allowed to have its own schools and cultural organizations to maintain its religious identity. Syrians may belong to different communities and be accorded different freedoms depending on where and to what they belong.[872]

Conversely, another Christian group like the Assyrians have not enjoyed the same liberties since they practise their religion in Arabic and not in the Syriac language. Altug explains that Assyrian groups, "which usually have Iraqi and diaspora connections, are under constant monitoring".[873] Kurds are another reversed example of exclusion according to the logic: since the majority of them are Sunni and they can practise their religion in Arabic, they are not allowed to have cultural associations even though they are not ethnically Arab. Syriac and Kurdish groups marginalised by the regime under the secular umbrella express other forms of religious discontent.[874] Unlike other groups like Armenians, the cultural and linguistic distinctiveness of the Kurds was not recognised.

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[870] Altug (2011), p. 83.
[871] Castellino, J., and Cavanaugh, K. (2013). *Minority rights in the Middle East*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
[872] Wilson (2014), p. 356.
[873] Altug (2011), p. 250.
[874] Altug (2011), p. 282.

According to the reasoning of advantaged and disadvantaged groups, it is possible to explain the current opposition against and support for the regime. Although Assad's regime is generally perceived as strengthening legal, social and political rights of minorities[875], this is not universally valid for all minorities. Anti-Assad Christian political groups include the Syriac Union Party and Suturo. These groups have requested protection for Christians without backing al-Assad.[876] The Syriac Union Party is exclusively Syriac, while Suturo also has non-Syriac Christian members.[877] Within Syrian Christians, the Assyrian Democratic Party supports the regime.[878] The opposition from Syriac groups seems to confirm that the secular logic of the regime for dealing with minorities does not represent equal treatment and can lead to minorities' discontent.

Political divisions can be noted within Syrian minorities, which are not only united in support for the regime. The protection of minorities is not automatically repressive of the Sunni majority, with some secular Syrian Sunnis aligned with the regime. In the current political impasse of Syria, Assad's secular formula has caused the discontent that led to the opposition formed around the discourse of political Islam in Syria. Article 35 of the Syrian Constitution states that the right of religious freedom and religious rites is protected, "provided they do not disturb the public order"[879].

Fox claims that the Syrian government "actually encourages moderate Islam by appointing moderate Muslims to leadership positions" and "monitors militant Muslim groups, mostly because they are perceived as a political threat".[880] As Hinnebusch notes, autonomy was granted to religious organisations "on condition that oppositional activity is eschewed".[881] Under the umbrella of "public order", "sectarian solidarity" and "peace of the state" the regime differentiated amongst religious actors and differentiated its positions towards them according to the political circumstances.

This dynamic is well explained by Tahir Zaman in terms of the "uncomfortable

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[875] Rafizadeh (2015), p. 30.
[876] Rafizadeh (2015), pp.127-129.
[877] Al-Tamimi (2014).
[878] Al-Tamimi (2014).
[879] The full versions of the Syrian Constitution before and after the referendum in 2012 are provided here: http://www.law.yale.edu/rcw/rcw/jurisdictions/asw/syrianarabrep/syria_constitution.pdf ; http://www.voltairenet.org/article173033.html
[880] Al-Tamimi (2014).
[881] Hinnebusch (1995), p. 254.

relationship between non-state-sponsored religious actors and the state".[882] The differentiation is also justified by "limited convergence of interests" between the state and some religious organisations, mostly Islamic.[883] The limits imposed on some religious organizations result in the creation of "politically independent clergy" and of private welfare provisions acting autonomously from the state.[884] On the other hand, state-sponsored organisations enjoyed fewer limitations and a weaker control on religious education.[885]

As a consequence, there is moderate state-sponsored secularism in Syria. Following Hinnebusch, intense secularism would imply a greater private sector, where Syrian minorities are active; formation of religious organisations outside the control of the state; and a more autonomous civil society in which "state penetrated associations" are no longer acceptable.[886] Instead, state intervention in religious matters still occurs in Syria and is well explained by Pierret. To prevent Islamisation of Syrian politics, the regime sponsored partnership with selected religious leaders and adopted a series of structural interventions[887] including secularisation of the law, intervention in civic and religious education, exclusion of religious elites from the state apparatus, and expansion of state control in religious institutions, mostly adhering to political Islam.[888] The second part of this chapter will be dedicated to the revival of political Islam in Syria as a form of political opposition against restrictive secular politics. Beforehand, it is interesting to look at interpretations of Syrian secularism by Syrian diasporans in order to understand the civil significance.

Civil secularism in diaspora

Secularism is an important political instrument in Syria[889], which is closely related to ethno-politics and the treatment of minorities. For its secular nature, the regime is thought to be well accepted by minority groups and also by the secularist fringe of Syrian Sunni majority.[890] As Khatib points out, during the period of political

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[882] Zaman (2012), p. 134.
[883] Zaman (2012).
[884] Pierret and Selvik (2009), pp. 605–610.
[885] Zaman (2012), p. 134.
[886] Hinnebusch (1995), pp. 248-254.
[887] Pierret in Hashemi and Postel (2013), p. 283.
[888] Pierret in Hashemi and Postel (2013), p. 284.
[889] Naturally, no state defined as "secular" is unarguably secular. As Fox claims, "nearly half of Western minorities fit in the category of "preferred treatment for some religion". Fox (2008), p. 121.
[890] Hashemi and Postel (2017).

opposition that followed the assassination of the Lebanese President Hariri in 2005, opposition activity was mostly secular and led by a coalition of different secularists.[891] Opposition groups, which did not target the secularity of the Syrian state at that time [892], stressed the cultural dimension of religion reasserting the culturalisation of Islam as the main component of Syrian secular formula.

Syrian secularism is closely connected to the majority issue, national identity and religious tolerance. The responses of Syrian diasporans also emphasised the connection between the majority/minority issue and the secular nature of the Syrian homeland. As also evident in the other chapters of the thesis, the matter is more complex than the paradigm of anti-secular Sunnis versus pro-secular minorities.

The data collected by Jonathan Fox in 2002 measuring the degree of secularism in many countries including Syria is a starting point to[893] evaluate the secularity of the Syrian state in relation to the minority rule. The Syrian level of restrictions on minorities, compared with other Middle Eastern countries, is one of the lowest[894] and Fox claims: "for the most part, religious minorities can practise freely". [895] Fox defines Syria, in 2002, as a Sunni majority country (74%), ruled by a minority, with a medium level of government involvement in religion.[896] Syria is described as having a "civil religion" where there is a "moderate separation between Religion and State". [897] To explain "civil religion" in Syria, Fox refers to "preferred treatment for some religions or support for a particular tradition". [898]

The term "civil" when referring to religion describes the confinement of religious issues within the secular realm of society. However, "preferred treatment" still implies a form of intervention of the state in religious matters. According to Fox, Syria, along with Libya, is the country that has the highest level of government regulation of the majority religion in the Middle East. [899] Fox's data only suggests that the Syrian system is problematically secular. Moving beyond comparative data, there is the need

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[891] Khatib (2011), p. 213.
[892] Khatib (2011)
[893] Interview, participant 4, Sydney.
[894] Syrian government's restrictive measures for minorities include only three kinds of restrictions out of 14 (Formal organisations; Arrest, detention, harassment; and Proselytising), and only three countries (Bahrain, Lebanon and Libya) have a lower level of 2 out of 14.
[895] Fox (2008), p. 246.
[896] Fox (2008), p. 219, Table 8.1.
[897] Fox (2008).
[898] Fox (2008), p. 225.
[899] Fox (2008), p. 221, Table 8.3.

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to investigate the nature of Syrian secular governance and how it shapes religious identities in Syria and in diaspora.

The secularity of the Syrian regime has always guaranteed security and the protection of minorities in Syria. From the interview-based questionnaires and in-depth interviews, secularism emerged as a main topic, closely related to religious coexistence in Syria. In the intensive case study with Syrian Armenians in Armenia, the vast majority showed support for the Syrian regime, confirming the general trend.

Syrian Armenians in Armenia manifested their general disinterest in politics. This is likely to be due to severe political marginalisation of Armenians in Syria, but this does not impact their understanding of Syrian secularism. The definitions given by participants for how they defined Syrian governance are: "secular" and "protective for minorities". The two are significant issues for Syrian Armenians, both singularly and coincidently recurrent

In the more extensive case study with Syrians in Australia, responses were more differentiated, given the more diverse religious and ethnic composition of the sample. The majority of participants in the Australian survey were Christians from different denominations[900], with a smaller number of Sunnis. Also with a more extensive sample, secularity and protection of minorities go hand in hand for the definition of the regime. This was also shown in the interviews. An interviewee said: "*Syria was the unique laic country protecting Christians in the Middle East. Because of its laic nature, it was protective of minorities without repressing the majority. The regime is not fully secular, but its major political party is secular*",[901] referring to the secular nature of the Ba'ath Party. Interestingly, the coincidence of the secularity of the regime with protection of minorities has the same significance in both the intensive and extensive case studies, with nearly the same proportion.

The response "repressive of majority" is given (14% of responses in Australia) in opposition to the secular nature of the regime and according to protection of minorities.[902] The survey does not imply agreement or disagreement on the nature of the regime, but only the representativeness of the definition in the views of participants. In the interview after the survey, a participant commented on this question:

Syria is a Muslim majority country and needs a government that represents

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[900] See Chapter 2.
[901] Interview, participant 2, Sydney.
[902] Survey results.

that majority. The Sunni majority does not feel represented by the separation between religion and the state, because Islam is not only a private religion, but also it has an influence on the public and the political life.[903]

A Christian participant highlighted the political nature of Islam in a negative way: "*Islam is a political religion; secularism and democracy are incompatible with Islam".[904]* Contrary to the incompatibility of Islam with democracy and secularism, a Sunni participant, founder of a Syrian Australian association in Sydney, said:

> *In our association, we do not talk about politics often, but sometimes a group of us feels that we have to rise our voice and express our political identity for democracy in Syria. I am Sunni, a religious man; I strongly believe that Syria needs to be a secular country, but not if secularism does not come with democracy.[905]*

According to the interviewee, the Syrian secular formula is incompatible with democracy because of its authoritarian nature.[906] This leads to a complex redefinition of the relationship between Islam, secularism and democracy. Figures 12 and 13 provide a summary how secularism, democracy and Islam are interconnected in the responses around a suitable political proposal for post-war Syria.

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[903] Interview, participant 15, Sydney.
[904] Interview, participant 26, Sydney.
[905] Interview, participant 1, Sydney.
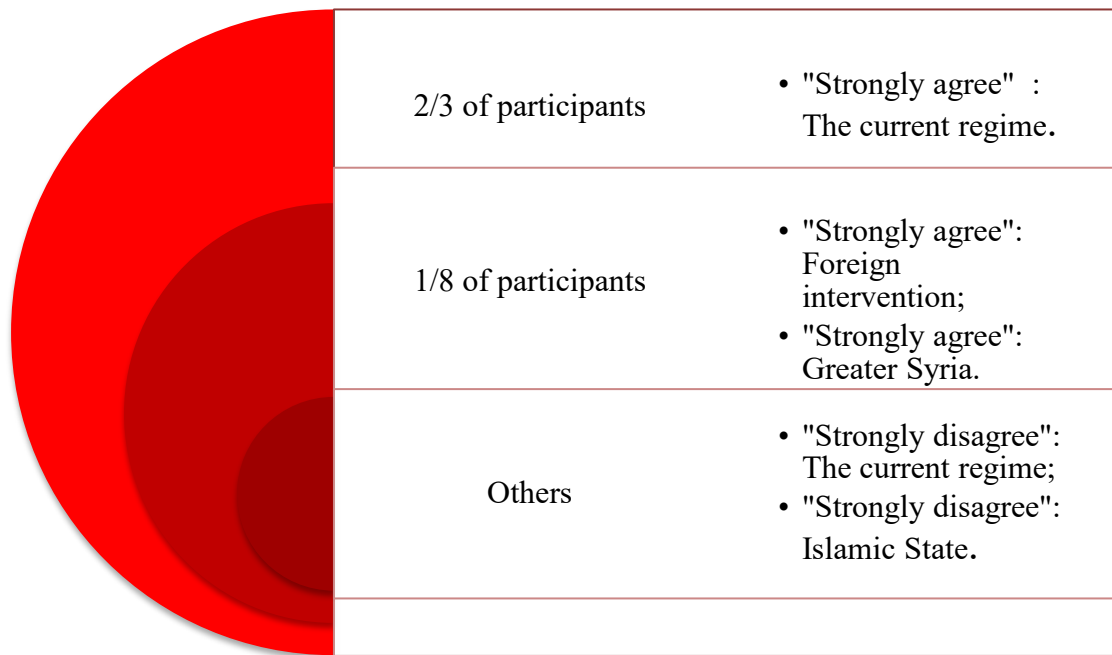[906] Survey results.

Figure 12: Armenian case study: Political proposal

 Note: Sample size of 48. Options: A=Islamic State; B=Regime; C=Secular Government;
D=Democracy; E=Foreign Intervention; F=Greater Syria; G=pan-Arabism; N=neutral.
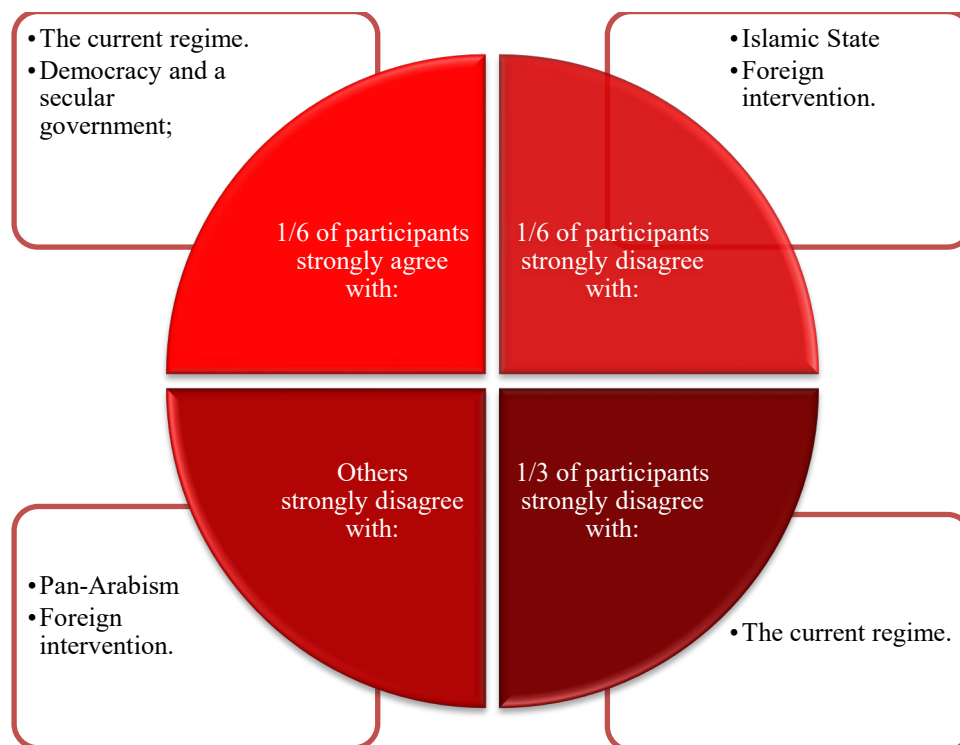

Figure 13: Australian case study: Political proposal

 Note: Sample size of 37. Options: A=Islamic State; B=Regime; C=Secular Government;
D=Democracy; E=Foreign Intervention; F=Greater Syria; G=pan-Arabism; N=neutral.

The relationship continues to drive the discussion below around political Islam in Syria.

7.3 Islamisation from above in Syria versus religiosity in diaspora

Secularism versus Islamisation from above in Syria

When dealing with the secular-Islamist divide, the two should not be treated as isolated blocks. Lust, Soltan and Wichman, amongst others, claim that: "In the heady days of the 2011 Arab uprisings, the Islamist-secularist rift was nearly buried, but it was never dead. Publics remain divided over the question of religion".[907] During the elections in Tunisia and Egypt after the uprising, voters were more aware of the religious component of the parties.[908] At the same time, it is important to underline the presence of profound divisions in each of the Islamists and "secularists" groupings, because they are far from being unified blocks, to the extent that "no one is entirely sure how many harbor either pro-secularist or pro-Islamist sentiments".[909]

In Syria, pro-secularist and pro-Islamist sentiments are tools for justifying Syrian political authority, on minority/majority and Sunni/Shia issues. The difference between the secular and Islamist sides in Syria is the conception of the authority, and how each deals with secularism. Religious parties consider secularism as a product of colonial subjugation and as a synonym for "dictatorship"[910], to the extent that the request for democracies by religious parties such as the Syrian Muslim Brothers led to the "dissociation" of the classical combination of secularism plus democracy.[911] Applying this to Syria, not surprisingly Bashar al-Assad, with his combination of secularism and authoritarianism, is the middleman.

As Pierret observes, the major political opposition to the secular program of the Ba'ath was led by figures that have long suffered from state repression.[912] State repression activated perceptions of inequalities. After 1970 only "loyal, privately funded, clerical networks" benefitted from support through state-sponsored private

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[907] Lust, G., Soltan A., and Wichmann, J. (2012). "After the Arab Spring: Islamism, secularism, and democracy." *Current history,* 111(724), 362-362, p. 362.
[908] Lust, Soltan, and Wichmann (2012), p. 363.
[909] Lust, Soltan, and Wichmann (2012), p. 364.
[910] Lust, Soltan, and Wichmann (2012).
[911] Herriot (2007), p. 80.
[912] Herriot (2007), p. 4.

initiatives.[913] Islamists, on the other hand, witnessed "drastic limitations" and direct and indirect de-radicalisation strategies.

Indirect measures promoted moderate Islam through re-appropriation of religious institutions and messages for depicting the good moderate Muslim.[914] Khatib calls this strategy moderate "Islamization from above".[915] The discourse that considers state-sponsored moderates as "good Muslims" versus "terrorists" [916] is a good example of the formation of Syrian Islamic identity from above, as a result of state indirect intervention in religious matters.

As Hurd points out, political Islam is a "modern language of politics" that explicitly challenges fundamental assumptions about religion and politics embedded in the secular governance.[917] Arguably, the secular nature of the Syrian regime is the target of Islamist groups, proposing the Islamic version of democracy they call *shūra*[918] "consultation". This system stresses the "superiority of Islamic values and conduct" and the importance of '*ijmā*' "consensus".[919] In particular, what is under discussion is not secularism *per se,* but more importantly the superiority of the state over religion and the conception of secular leadership.[920]

In Syria, political Islam is opposed to secularism and, at the same time, proposes itself as an alternative to authoritarianism. Feldman defines Islamism as composed of political movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood willing to remove the "corrupted" secular regimes and to adapt the constitutional system with "Islamic values" and Islamic Law.[921] In this sense, the Islamic State did not mean the negation of democratic values. On the contrary, Feldman defines this political program as "democratization of Islamic Law": "democratically eligible leaders" trying to fill the vacuum of secularisation with Islamic rules.[922]

The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood endorses such elements. [923] "Ikhwan al-

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[913] Herriot (2007), p. 80.
[914] Khatib (2011), p. 106.
[915] Khatib (2011).
[916] Khatib (2011), p. 106.
[917] Hurd (2008), p. 115.
[918] "We want to restore the right of the Muslim people to choose their leaders independently – he says – and establish just governance through an Islamic system that we know as Shura" (Muhajir, in a SBS interview, 24 March 2015).
[919] Qammudi (2015).
[920] See also Herriot (2007).
[921] Feldman, N. (2010). *The fall and rise of the Islamic State*. Princeton: Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 125
[922] Feldman (2010), p. 126.
[923] In an article about the analysis of Muslim Brothers' practice and discourse, Weismann defines the

Muslimun" since the 1940s has used the ideology of modern and democratic Islam in Syria to reinforce the struggle against the colonial domination that was at the forefront of their political mobilisation.[924] As Weismann highlights, their role in Syrian policy is closely linked with democracy, so that he speaks of a "democratic fundamentalism".[925] The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood has proposed a form of Islamic State that does not wish to overturn the institutional basis of the state.[926] Its form is also opposed to the idea of the "theocratic state", as stressed by Campanini.[927]

Islamic State proposals all have in common opposition to the autocratic regime. On the one hand, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood has used the democratic discourse to attack the Syrian regime stressing its despotic nature. It proposes parliamentary elections and includes the recognition of Islam as the state religion and the Islamic Law in a "secular" state like Syria, as in the words of Bashar al-Assad.[928] On the other hand, the dream of the Caliphate has re-emerged with Islamist groups like al-Qaeda-linked al-Nusra and ISIS.

Islamic State in the Syrian conflict

There are many variations of Islamic State that differ according to the conception of the Caliphate. The Caliphate (from *khalīfa* with the meaning of succession) is a form of leadership compatible with a degree of secularism[929] (the Ottoman Empire was a form of secularised Caliphate, for example). The Caliphate itself is an "interpretation of Islam", which emphasises its political and social import.[930] In Syria, the proposed Caliphate is openly in conflict with the secular regime. Categorising Islamist groups according to political intensity, there are three major movements, all in the quest for

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Islamic party as "the foremost socio-religious association in the Arab world. It was founded in Egypt in 1928 by the charismatic teacher Hasan al-Banna on the basis of the late nineteenth-century Salafi ideology, which called for the adaptation of Islam to the modern age by reviving the legacy of the righteous forefathers". It is different from the Egyptian one, since it has different social compositions, political programs and strategies. Weismann, I. (2010). "Democratic fundamentalism? The practice and discourse of the Muslim Brothers Movement in Syria". *The Muslim World*, 100, p. 1.

[924] Weismann (2010), p. 12.

[925] Weismann (2010).

[926] Feldman (2010), p. 124.

[927] Campanini, M. (2013). "Longing for democracy: a new way to political transformation from an Islamic perspective." *Philosophy and social criticism,* 39(4-5), 349-359, p. 354.

[928] Bashar al-Assad's propaganda uses secularism in many circumstances such as "Assad's recent lie: 'I am secularism's last fortress" (*Al-Arabiya*, 8 May 2015) http://english.alarabiya.net/views/2013/03/05/269716.html

[929] Hashemi, N. (2009). *Islam, secularism and liberal democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[930] Feldman (2010), p. 126.

Syrian political authority:

1. The "quasi-Caliph strategy" to implement the Islamic State within the institutions of the nation, such as the moderate side of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood.[931]

2. The "virtual Caliphate" based on the idea the Muslim community is virtually linked together by the dream of the Caliphate, such as al-Qaeda, which considers the concrete creation of the Caliphate "premature".[932]

3. The "declared Caliphate", such as ISIS in Syria, as an advanced stage of Islamism, if compared to the former two. It considers the Caliphate as possible to realise, starting from *al-Sham* region, which includes the territories of Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan. The leader of ISIS al-Baghdadi is a real Caliph, a self-declared successor of the foundational Caliphate of Muhammad's pure Islam. ISIS is anti-nationalist and anti-pan-Arab, since in the new Caliphate there is no space for the previous institutions. The state and Arab nationalism are considered not acceptable by ISIS as modern creations, as only what is prescribed by the Islamic Law can be accepted. In the Caliph's opinion, Islamic Law is a complete "Constitution" for the Islamic State. [933]

Pan-Islamism is the main ideology used for the Islamic State proposal in Syria for driving identification of the population in held territories and for downplaying sub-national and sub-religious differences. Pan-Islamism has to be considered as the alternative to pan-Arabism, since the two are hardly compatible. As Sayyid outlines, pan-Islamism is different from pan-Arabism, not only because pan-Islamism follows a phase of decline of pan-Arabism after the failure of Nasser, but also because it tries to replace the "privileged Arabness which reduces the 'globality' of the Muslim world to Arab ethnic specificity".[934] Syria claimed to be the most Arab of the Arab countries, so, not surprisingly, the pan-Islamist counterpart urges political Islam to take ground there, even though this was not the case soon after the failure of the pan-Arab experiments.[935]

In its attempt to implement the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, ISIS has developed the general conception of an Islamic State with a very narrow

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[931] Feldman (2010).

[932] Atwan, A. B. (2015) *Islamic State: roots, brutality and future* [in Arabic] Beirut: Dar al-Saqi.

[933] Feldman (2010).

[934] Sayyid (2002), p. 52.

[935] See Chapter 4.

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interpretation of Islamic norms. In particular, the idea of the removal of *jahiliyyah,* commonly translated as "ignorance"[936], derives from Salafi fundamentalism that looks at the pre-Islamic period as the "history of ignorance" and the introduction of Islam as the period of revelation[937]. In ISIS's ideology this is extended to not only what is before the foundation of Islam, but also after that, as deviation from pure Islam.

The three ways for moving beyond "ignorance" are:

1. "Faith" in Salafi interpretation;
2. *Hijra* as "sacred pilgrimage", in an advanced meaning as the migration from *dār al-kufra* "community of infidels" to *dār al-Islām* "community of believers"[938];
3. *Jihad*[939] as "struggle": here the term refers to the fight for the implementation of the Islamic State against its enemies and for its expansion.

Taking for granted its aim to restore the medieval Caliphate[940], how does ISIS stand in the discourse surrounding Syrian political authority?

The identity-related aspects of its Islamist ideology, including the treatment of religious minorities, foster the polarization of groups around religion. Given that ISIS does not have fixed "political borders" but a collection of territories in Iraq and Syria, the implementation of a new form of Caliphate is its major goal. Wood notes that, unlike Bin Laden's proposal of "a prologue to the Caliphate" with "autonomous cells", ISIS promises a "sincere commitment" to return to "the seventh century's legal environment".[941]

The distinction between al-Nusra (still linked to al-Qaeda) and ISIS is clarified by a declaration of one of al-Nusra's foreign jihadists from Australia. Abu Suleiman claims: "All Islamic movements around the world want an Islamic State, but the IS

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[936] I use the common translation of *jahiliyya* as "ignorance". The term can lead to confusion: it commonly refers to the period before the revelation of Islam, so it refers to the non-knowledge of Islam, and, therefore, of God.

[937] Salafism, from the Arabic root *ṣalaf* 'ancestor', is an Islamic originalist movement that considers the foundation of Islam as the purest historical period. Salafists wish for a return to the fathers and the founders of Islam, in opposition to modernisation. A further development is Wahhabism (from Abu al-Wahhabi, its first theorist), on the basis, for instance, of the Saudi Arabian regime.

[938] The term is one of the pillars in the faith of Islam: it is the duty of every Muslim to make the pilgrimage towards Mecca at least once in their life. Here, there is a further interpretation of the term as the migration towards the Islamic State.

[939] The word jihad has different interpretations in Islam, since it can refer to either the internal struggle for the personal accomplishment with Islam or to the external fight for the establishment of Islam.

[940] Wood, G. (2015). "What Isis really wants. (Islamic State)(Cover Story)." The Atlantic 315, no. 2: 78.

[941] Wood (2015), p. 80.

groups have defined themselves as the exclusive bearers of Islam, de-legitimizing the rest of the Muslim community".[942] This is an instance of exclusivist Wahhabism "taking over the mainstream Sunni Islam".[943]

The division amongst Muslim fighters in the Syrian conflict is justified by the selective approach of ISIS, which is a key to its power. Al-Ibrahim outlines that ISIS stems from, but it different from, the "unaltered" ("radical") version of Wahhabism, a restriction within Salafism itself.[944] In this view, ISIS considers, for instance, Saudi Arabia as illegitimate, since it is an alteration (pragmatism) of pure Wahhabism.[945] Afterward al-Ibrahim clarifies the distinction even between Wahhabism and ISIS, in the sense that ISIS recruits fighters from all over the world, making it an international organisation, whereas the Wahhabi movement operated at a local level.[946]

The secular identity of society has repeatedly been the target of Salafi and Wahhabi movements that consider it a degradation of Islamic values. Under the Ottoman Empire, Wahhabi leaders criticised Ottoman Syrian society for its exercise of "polytheistic practices including sacrifice other than to God, erection of edifices over tombs, belief in the intercession of the prophets, martyrs and saints".[947] Today, also because of its secular tradition, Syria has become a sort of "promised land" for ISIS's mission of purifying what they see as a morally corrupt society. For Wahhabists, Syria is a concrete war field to conquer and to redeem.

In 2013, Syria, and ISIS's Syrian enclaves, became the destination of *hijra* and a place for jihad*,* which is the jihadi pilgrimage with a return or the definitive migration to the self-declared Islamic State. Since it has started its local governing, ISIS is looking for support from non-Salafi actors, especially for the sympathies of Sunnis living in Syrian villages.[948] The political targets are: to fight the corruption of the "secular regimes" and, afterwards, to save the Sunni opposition from "injustice" of

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[942] Suleiman, SBS, 24 March 2015.
[943] Cockburn (2015), p. 6.
[944] Al-Ibrahim, B. (2015). "ISIS, Wahhabism and Takfir." *Contemporary Arab Affairs, 8*(3), 408-415, p. 409.
[945] Al-Ibrahim (2015), p. 410.Entire quotation of the distinctions within Wahhabism: "at a point of history, it is important to point out that Wahhabism, after the Battle of Sabilla (1929), between King Abdulaziz and his loyal Wahhabi rule (religious scholars), on one side, and Ikhwan man ta'a Allah (the Brothers of One who Obeyed God, also known as the Ikhwan). On the other, became divided, as a concept, into two strands: one pragmatic the other radical".
[946] Al-Ibrahim (2015), p. 410.
[947] Al-Ibrahim (2015), p. 410.
[948] Cockburn (2015), p. 8.

imprisonments and exclusion.[949] Pierret's analysis is correct in claiming that "Syrian groups were not created as a counterweight to Salafi organizations; rather, they only were the early mainstream of the insurgency, only waiting for someone to help them".[950]

ISIS and minorities

The emergence of ISIS and its exclusivist ideology has further problematised the question of religion for political support in Syria. Here the discussion focuses on Christian minorities versus ISIS, due to the great number of Syrian Christian participants surveyed. Kurds are another very interesting group when dealing with reactions against ISIS, but it is not possible to engage in such a geopolitically complex issue. Reynolds describes one of the most surprising actions by Syrian Christians:

> When the Syrian army, with the help of the Lebanese militia Hezbollah, took control of the town almost a year later, on June 5, 2013, Christians hung the Syrian flag of the Assad regime from churches and joined public celebrations. Televised interviews featured Christians thanking Assad and Hassan Nasrallah, the charismatic leader of Hezbollah, for saving them from the rebels.[951]

The support for Hezbollah by Syrian Christians is surprising, since Hezbollah is not a secular political party. The name "Party of God" itself does not suggest a secular program. Ora Szekely identifies Hezbollah's domestic policy program as pursuing "Islamic revolution in Lebanon".[952] The signs of proximity between Syrian Christians and Hezbollah in the fight against ISIS in Syria are difficult to explain, given that Syrian Christians support secularism in Syria.[953] Also in the survey, secular governance was their preferred option.[954]

Again, Gramsci's thought can be explanatory. Given that identity is constructed in the relationship with the other, and with relationships of power[955], in the frame of the Syrian conflict, the existence of the "collective individual" is valid. For Syrian Christians, Islamist groups like al-Nusra and ISIS represent the "other", the emerging group that creates an "instable equilibrium between the dominant group and

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[949] Cockburn (2015).
[950] Cockburn (2015), p. 253.
[951] Reynolds, G. S. (2013). "The devil they know: why most Syrian Christians support Bashar al-Assad." *Commonwealth,* 140(14), 10, p. 10.
[952] Reynolds (2013).
[953] Reynolds (2013).
[954] Survey results. See figure
[955] In the notable Kantian contribution.

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subordinate groups". [956]

In the eyes of Syrian Christians, Islamist ideology is not the expression of leadership, but a "dominant, exercising coercive force alone". [957] ISIS is not threatening because of its Islamic nature, but rather because of its illegitimate dominant nature. The stance of Syrian Christians is partly justified by a diffused ignorance of the Islamic Law amongst non-Muslim Arabs, as Sergiani warns. [958] Sergiani explains that, according to Sharia there are four families and two groups of non-Muslims in the Islamic State, each related to a legal treatment. The first group includes non-Muslims living inside the Islamic State:

1. Family of the sin ('*ahl al-zumma*): they are permanent residents or citizens of the Islamic State. They have "no rights" and "no duties" at the beginning of implementation of the Islamic State, but "assurances" (*ḍamān*). They can obtain citizenship and be given the rights of a Muslim, without being forced to covert.[959]

2. Family of the trust: they are temporary residents of the Islamic State; they are allowed to operate and to do business in the Islamic State.[960] This group includes non-Muslims living outside the Islamic State in a belligerent relation with the Islamic State.

3. Family of the epoch: during a temporary peaceful agreement they are allowed to have access to the Islamic State temporarily.[961]

4. Family of the war: they are called "infidels" (*kuffār*) when there is a war between their state and the Islamic State.[962]

The treatment of both Muslim and non-Muslim minorities by ISIS appears inconsistent with the prescriptions for the first "family" outlined above.

Reynolds describes the events that see ISIS fighters destroying Christian symbols: "Yet over time Islamist fighters (or jihadists) became increasingly powerful. On June 13, 2012, Islamists looted the Melkite Catholic church of Qusayr and posed for pictures dressed in clerical garments". [963] The reason for that is likely to reside in

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[956] Gramsci (1971), p. 289.
[957] Gramsci (1971), p. 290.
[958] Sergiani (2011), p. 46.
[959] Sergiani (2011), p. 66.
[960] Sergiani (2011), p. 67.
[961] Sergiani (2011), p. 66.
[962] Sergiani (2011).
[963] Reynolds (2013).

ISIS's conception of locals as generally belonging to *ahl al-ḥarb* (the family of war). This is also valid for Muslims, both Sunni and Shia, who represent a threat to the Islamic State or an offence to the "pure Islam", or apostasy. As Reynolds warns:

> Incidents of religious persecution – of anyone accused of offending Islam – are on the rise in rebel territory. On June 8 Islamists publicly executed a fifteen-year-old Muslim boy accused of insulting the Prophet Muhammad in Aleppo. They shot him in the mouth in front of his parents.[964]

This strategy has been defined by Atwan as the "strategy of brutality"[965] (*tawaḥush*, see above), which targets both non-Muslim and Muslim deviances from the "pure Islam". Atwan notes that this reflects the idea that ISIS reaches its goals by following "priorities".[966] The first one is *tamkīn* that can be translated as the sovereign possession and the maintenance of the territory. The second step is *taḥrīr*, the "liberation" of the occupied territories by oppositional forces.[967] Atwuan does not explain what comes after the liberation phase. He notes instead that there will be an even more "clear separation within the Salafi movements of al-Nusra, ISIS and Ahrār al-Shām in Syria", and the regime will take advantage of Salafi fragmentation.[968]

Fears of Islamic State in Syrian diasporas

The brutality of groups like ISIS justifies the strong disagreement by Syrian diasporans with the Islamic State, which is considered by them an external occupation from foreign soldiers[969], and concerns of minorities about an Islamic State in Syria. All responses, regardless of the religious identity of participants, conveyed concerns about the presence of ISIS in Syria. An interviewee reported: *"Once ISIS and al-Nusra started killing or kicking out Christians, we are scared. Our fears have escalated after ISIS took some villages around Der'a"*. Disappointment with the rise of ISIS in Syria is universal. Another interviewee said: *"Many people supporting the rebels got upset because they do not feel represented by the Caliphate"*. The president of a Syrian Armenian NGO in Yerevan said: *"Right now, IS groups wish for an Islamic State in Syria. Now Syria is divided religiously. The Syrian Armenian community would never return to Syria if an Islamic State were implemented.*

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[964] Reynolds (2013).
[965] Atwan (2015), p. 226.
[966] Atwan (2015), p. 227.
[967] Atwan (2015), p. 230.
[968] Atwuan (2015), p. 224.
[969] Survey results.

Religious freedom is very important to them".[970]

There was widespread disagreement on Islamic State in the survey (see above figure 12 and 13). Two Sunni participants commented: *"The proposal of Islamic State proposed by ISIS does not conform to our faith".[971]* A participant commented on this option: *"Even though all Christians are fleeing Syria and Muslim fighters are coming from outside Syria, Syria is not going to become an Islamic country".[972]* In the open-ended questions on the needs of Syrian people, three participants answered in a similar way: there is the need *"to stop supporting terrorists coming from outside"; "to end the support to terrorists in the country";* and *"to put an end to the killings perpetrated by terrorists".[973]*

For the extensive case study in Australia, there is correspondence between strong disagreement with Islamic State in Syria and strong agreement on the political proposal that includes a secular and democratic system. Chapters 4 and 6 showed divisions, also political, between Syrian Christians and Sunni Syrians in Australia. But, despite divisions, groups tend to agree on the proposal of a secular and democratic Syria, with or without the actual regime. As Reynolds notes, unlike Egypt, where the Copts were part of the opposition against Mubarak, from the very beginning Syrian Christians were distant from the Syrian protests.[974] An instance of the direct link between religious identity and political orientation in Syria, not in spite of but rather depending on secularism, is the formula that Syrian Christians support Bashar al-Assad while Sunnis oppose him (see Chapter 4).[975] This is generally true in the survey, but this is undoubtedly due to the example of Islamist groups who have acted in particular ways towards Christian and other non-Muslims after the other Arab revolutions, and also because of the "fear" of an Islamic State in Syria. [976]

Religious institutions in diaspora

Altug points out that confessional and cultural autonomy in Syria is allowed only in

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[970] Interview, participant 3, Sydney.
[971] Comments by participants 26 and 35, Sydney and Melbourne.
[972] Comment by participant 33, Sydney.
[973] Comments by participants 27, 28 and 34, Sydney and Melbourne.
[974] Reynolds, G. S. (2013). "The devil they know: why most Syrian Christians support Bashar al-Assad." *Commonwealth,* 140 (14), 10.
[975] See also interviews in the last chapter.
[976] Byman (2014).

the forms of communal institutions like churches[977] which were considered separated from the state. However, churches and religious institutions became the places for religious communities to fulfil a wide of range of interests and have been transformed into spaces for cultural activities, social welfare and assistance, and even political debate.[978] The analysis of Syrian diaspora in Australia and Armenia shows that religious organisations maintain such comprehensive roles also in the host countries.[979]

Armenians are a significant group for understanding the civic role of churches for Syrian communities. For Armenian diasporans, the church is the place where diasporic identity can be maintained *par excellence.*[980] The church is not only the place where religion is practised, but also where a consistent part of the social and political life of the diaspora is conducted. This is also evident in Australia. A representative of the Armenian community of Sydney said: "*The church is the place where Syrian Armenians refugees socialise and can express themselves*".[981]

Social observation and participation in the events of the Armenian church of Sydney showed that after religious celebrations the church became a space for a wide range of formal discussions for the community. Syrian displacement was discussed and a plan for accepting Syrian Armenian refugees in Australia was developed. Members talked about the possibility of Syrian Armenian families applying for a visa sponsored by the Armenian Church. Other topics included the planning of different activities such as the march for the commemoration of the Armenian Genocide that takes place every year on 24 April, talks about the Genocide or about the political situation of the homeland, and trips to Armenia and other social events such as dinner dances, mother's day celebrations, and day trips.

In Armenia, Syrian Armenians found different forms of secularity and religiosity from the Syrian ones. A participant said:

> *Back in Syria, family tradition used to coexist with modernity and*
> *government rules used to be secular. Most importantly, as a member of a*
> *Christian community in Syria, I never witnessed discrimination between*

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[977] Altug (2011), p. 84.
[978] Altug (2011), p. 85; McCallum (2012), p. 121.
[979] On the role of diaspora Syrian churches in America see Khater (2005), p. 311.
[980] Suny (1993).
[981] Interview, participant 4, Sydney.

> *Christians and Muslims. Here, Armenia is secular in a different way, and locals are religious in a different way.* [982]

A service analyst explained the difference: "*Another cultural difference between local and diaspora Armenians concerns religion: the former are religious by tradition (costumes and family reasons) with no spirituality, the latter are very spiritual*".

In the Soviet period Armenia was subjected to forced secularisation of the laic state, and churches were dismantled. This had an influence on Armenian secularism. As Butchard and Hovannisian put it, in post-Soviet Armenia, secularisation was inhibited because of the strong connection between church and national identity in the Armenian case and because it was imposed on Armenia. [983]

The result is that in Armenia secularity "simply refers to the non-religious nature of social spaces, institutions or social relations".[984] The non-religious nature of social spaces in the Armenian diaspora is the opposite of what happens in the Syrian diaspora. At the Etchmiadzin Cathedral in Armenia, the mother Church of the Armenian Apostolic Church, a group of Syrian Armenians confirmed that, while in Syria they used to go to the church also for social purposes, in Yerevan they attend functions only for spiritual reasons.[985]

The social dimension of some religious institutions in Syria, as noted by Altug, and corroborated in the case study of Syrian Armenians, further problematises Syrian secularism, if secularism is intended to be the separation between the public and the private sphere for religion. A participant said: "*In Syria, I used to be a Muslim Alawi advisor. You were not allowed to talk about religion in public. You could practise religion in religious institutions or at home. I do not believe in the public meaning of religion*".[986] A former Syrian consul also insisted on the private nature of religion in Syria: "*In public you cannot really differentiate groups according to religion. If you go in-depth, you see the differences*".

The perspective of interviewees is secular in the sense religion is a matter of individual consciousness, belongs to the private sphere and contribute is irrelevant to

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982 Interview, participant 2, Yerevan.
983 Burchardt, M. and Hovannisyan, H. (2016). "Religious vs secular nationhood: 'Multiple secularities' in post-Soviet Armenia". *Social Compass,* 63 (4), 427-443, p. 428.
984 Burchardt and Hovannisyan (2016).
985 Miscellaneous interviews, Yerevan.
986 Interview, participant 6, Sydney.

the understanding of politics and public life, as Erin Wilson puts it.[987] A respondent said: "*For me, secularism means living together in the same land having different beliefs and religions; those are a private matter*".[988] The private nature of religion asserted in numerous interviews is problematic, since religious are less matters of private belief than of public practice when they constitute various forms of community life[989] as in the case of Syria. The role of faith-based associations in Syria and in diaspora in the humanitarian crisis in response to forced migration cannot be ignored.

As Wilson claims concerning faith-based welfare provision: "often, such activities are characterised, by both analysts and the religious actors themselves, as 'gap-fillers' – providing 'first-aid' to failing systems, meeting needs that either used to be or never have been met by the state".[990] This is true in Syria, as shown above, and in diaspora where faith-based associations filled the gap between authorities and refugees in Armenia and Australia. In Australia, the association of Syrian Christians Australians and that of Australian Syrians (mostly Sunni) have also acquired a political role in driving the discussion on Syria.[991] Their political activism assumes both intentional and unintentional religious dimensions, with implications for the practice of both politics and religion.

The Religious/Secular Rift explained by Syrian Diasporans

The public/private divide appears restrictive for understanding Syrian secularity. The religious/political divide and religious freedom is more explicative. Interpretations of secularism by diasporans, in fact, focus on the rift between the religious and the secular realms. Explaining what the expression "Syria is a secular country means, a respondent said:

> In Syria, everyone could practise their religion, to wear the clothes they
> chose. Religious freedom for me is when everyone can worship whom they
> want, pray the way they like, dress in a way that makes them feel good, but

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[987] Wilson (2014), p. 350.
[988] Interview, participant 7, Melbourne.
[989] May, S., Wilson, E., Baumgart-Ochse, C., and Sheikh, F. (2014). "The Religious as Political and the Political as Religious: Globalisation, Post-Secularism and the Shifting Boundaries of the Sacred." *Politics, Religion & Ideology,* 15(3), pp. 1-16, p. 12.
[990] Wilson (2014), p. 356.
[991] See previous chapter.

always without interfering in the freedom of others.[992]

Thus, secularism is directly related to religious freedom. It is also dissociated from the political life, as in another response:

> *Syria was the only country in the Arab region that had 25 different sects. I believe it was the first secular country in the Middle East. The process of secularization in Syria began under the French Mandate in the 1920s and continued under different governments. The constitution guarantees freedom of religious expression to the various communities that include many Christian denominations. Political forms of Islam are not tolerated by the government.[993]*

The dissociation between the religious and the political exists in a two-way direction, if the two responses are put together: politics do not interfere with religion and vice versa.

This kind of secular agreement cannot transcend religion and the existence of different sects. Because of this, two respondents were critical about the secularity of Syria. One said: *"Although Syria is still not secular in its constitution and laws – because the society and public opinion are still not mature enough to accept a secular state – secular values exist in Syria".[994]* Here, the comment is likely to refer to the adoption of Islamic Law and the presence of Islamic courts in Syria. The second one was more sceptical: *"Syria cannot be completely secular because religion prevents it from being completely secular".[995]* Given that no country is "completely secular", these responses indicate that a neat distinction between the religious and the secular is not possible in reality.

7.4 Conclusion

Secularism in Syria implies the institutional and practical separation between the public and the private sphere when dealing with religion. Unlike pan-Arabism, which is an imagined political identity (Chapter 3), and sectarianism, which is a mere tool of identity politics (Chapter 4), the secular formula is in the interests of Syrian diasporans for addressing religious freedom and diversity.

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[992] Interview, participant 10, Melbourne.
[993] Interview, participant 8, Melbourne.
[994] Interview, participant 12, Melbourne.
[995] Interview, participant 6, Sydney.

For such reason, secularism is more likely than pan-Arabism to represent the aspirations of both Syrian minorities and a vast segment of the Sunni majority. Participants in the survey expressed their political adherence to secularism, particularly in connection to the protection of minorities. The survey did not identify whether the secular formula is felt to be repressive of the majority. Sunni interviewees expressed mixed views on this. While they agree with the secularity of the Syrian state, they would like their Sunni identity to be more represented at state level.

As the analysis of al-Assad's secular formula shows, secularism has been inconsistently adopted by the regime. The inconsistency is explained by the use of the secular card to gain and maintain political power and to differentiate amongst and within both Muslim and non-Muslim, and both Shia and Sunni religious groups in Syria. State intervention has occurred to contain the opposition around political Islam in Syria, generally perceived as a threat to the regime. In the Hama uprising, the secular became potential site of isolation, domination, violence and exclusion in Syria. Repressive politics towards political religious movements that followed did not prevent, but rather, provoked entrenchment. Not surprisingly, then, Islamism, contesting the authoritarian nature of the Syrian secular regime and proposing different forms of Islamic State in Syria, is a significant wing of regime opposition.

Away from the two extremes of secularisation and Islamisation from above, the religious and the secular are not inversely proportional categories of analysis. The combination of theoretical and empirical analysis suggests that feelings of religiosity do not wish to undermine the secular nature of the state, and secular feelings are not directed to eradicate religion. Secularism and religion simultaneously shape identity constructs. This is also valid for diasporic communities, which, despite internal religious divisions, adhere to secular principles for the need to preserve Syria's ethnic-sectarian mosaic. Religious institutions, formally or informally recognised by the Syria state according to the political orientation, function as intermediaries between the private and the public sphere.

This thesis shows for the first time how the secular identity of the state corresponds to how diasporans feel about their own identity. This does not mean that diasporans uncritically absorb the state-sponsored secular formula. Rather, they have developed a secular formula of their own. Secularisation from above, intended in Syria as the culturalisation and privatisation of religion imposed by the state, does not necessarily dictate Syrian secularity. Secularity refers to the way secularism is

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manifested by Syrian citizens and implies that religious identity has both a spiritual and a social dimension that does not contest the secular nature of political institutions.

Chapter 8. Conclusion: The ambiguity of identity

This thesis has framed the formation of politics of belonging in a diasporic space where Syrian migrants organised philanthropic and political associations, and debated nationalist ideas and political views through a set of institutions bridging their communities to the Syrian homeland. By definition, the core of any diasporic experience is in the link between diaspora and the homeland, in which the shared history and national culture of Syrian diasporans living abroad are manifested. The result is the mirror, the indirect and imagined picture of Syria that transpires from the interpretations of Syrian national issues by diasporans.

An Australian with Syrian descent who did not participate in the survey (not knowing about it) but attended a presentation on the results of the fieldwork asked an excellent question, paraphrased as: Can we ascertain from these responses that before the war Syria was a beautiful country, where everyone was happy and where nothing, including the political regime, needed to change? This at best summarises the mirrored image of Syria that generally arises from diasporic narratives. There is no positive or negative answer. But the vision can be interpreted as likely to be romanticised by the diasporic experience itself and, at the same time, the expression of an authentic patriotic connection to the Syrian homeland.

8.1 Diasporic visions

Albeit the absence of historic sedimentation in the displacement generated by the Syrian refugee crisis since 2011, the Syrian immigrant communities observed in this study exemplify a new diasporic dimension. The significance of their attachment to Syria, the scale of the dispersion, and most importantly, the *vis-à-vis* interaction between generations of migrants for the sake of the Syrian patria are all elements classifiable under diaspora. The relationship between diaspora organizations and the homeland has been defined through the lenses of politicisation around identity in space and time. The spatial dimension, inherently associated with diaspora, reflects the distance from Syria that widened after the outbreak of conflict due to the impossibility of return. Dispersal and displacement led to a re-imagination of Syria as a distant and utopian home. Time was also a determining factor in the formation of a national consciousness, since retrospective visions have driven the interpretations of

the events that left a mark on Syrian groups. Historic discontinuity characterised the remembrance of mostly tragic moments of Syrian history, due to the catastrophic situation Syria is currently facing.

Diasporic memories, even recent, create a utopian perception of the events in return.[996] Syrian Armenian participants in Armenia, who witnessed the beginning of the hostilities in Syria, were normally very optimistic about the future of Syria, expressed by the recurrent expression *mustaqbal zāhir,* translating into "bright future", something that also made them think of a possible return. Their responses included: *"I love my state, Syria, which in the future, I am sure, will be a strong and human state"* and *"Syria will be a safe state, where peace, a united population and democratic regime will be in place".*[997]

The trend had parallels in Australia, where answers included: *"In the future, I see a strong secular Syria"*; *"I expect a good future, once the hostilities will be finished"*; and *"I am optimistic about the future of Syria. The war will finish soon".*[998] Other similar replies also wished that the situation *"before the war"* was restored.[999] One, in particular, was more politically engaged: *"I expect a wonderful and bright future. Syrian people need to restore the situation as it was before the war".*[1000] The return to "normality" was also frequently desired in both the case studies.[1001]

The responses of leaders of activist associations in Australia or of intellectuals in Armenia, more limited in numbers, convey a different perception of the Syrian present and future. The divergence of visions between politically engaged leaders and unengaged members of community associations emerges.[1002] The leader of an Australian Syrian association said: *"The crisis is not likely to finish without Assad gone. There is no longer trust between the ruling class and the people in Syria".*[1003] The spokesman of another association said: *"The partition of Syrian territories would be a sad but most likely outcome of the conflict".*[1004] Syrian Armenian intellectuals were also more critical about the situation:

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[996] Tsolidis (2014).
[997] Survey results and miscellaneous interviews (Armenia).
[998] Survey results and miscellaneous interviews (Australia).
[999] Survey results and miscellaneous interviews (Australia).
[1000] Survey results.
[1001] Survey results.
[1002] Lai (2006).
[1003] Interview, participant 10, Melbourne.
[1004] Interview, participant 8, Sydney.

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Intellectual work here in Yerevan and in Syria is distant from civil society
and has to do only with history and literature. Intellectuals live in fear;
even more here than in Syria as far as politics is concerned. Prestige is the
most important thing for them. If this is an intellectual, I am not one of
them. I wish things could change but I do not think they will very soon.[1005]

Political stances strongly influence the vision on Syria and the future of Syria. Activism in the two diasporas chosen as case studies is composed of humanitarian assistance, writings, political discussions, social activities and peaceful demonstrations.

Nevertheless, a form of impassiveness characterises activities. Other than humanitarian actions and political debates, there is no evidence that diasporic activism directly contributes to the situation in Syria. Conservative and revolutionary voices of the diaspora found themselves speaking more intensively to one another, than to the homeland. The close correlation between crisis and revolt in the homeland and the political significance of diasporic activism does not determine a real political connectivity to the politics of the homeland.

The lack of participation is due to three major causes: the humanitarian and political impasse in Syria; the authoritarian nature of the regime that left groups distant from the political arena; and the perception of an overwhelming presence of "foreign actors" and geopolitical issues unable to be solved by single communities. Frustration for the present, alongside optimism around the future, is an overwhelming feeling in diaspora. The two are compatible, since the impossibility of acting for change makes diasporans dream of a bright future. Also, because of the restricted agency of Syrians in Armenia and Australia, the research has framed their engagement in the category of diaspora rather than long-distance activism or politics of exile. Diaspora conforms to the narratives of Syrian Australian and Armenian communities that aim to engage the homeland sentimentally after the catastrophic event of the war and the dispersal caused by the refugee crisis.

8.2 Major findings and ambiguities of identity

The study has empirically provided an opportunity for Syrian diasporans to express

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[1005] Interview, participant 7, Yerevan.

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their political identity in relation to the homeland. There was an opportunity to investigate the influence of politicised identity in Syria on identity formation in diaspora. The post-structuralist account on diaspora and the constructivist approach towards identity have been helpful to dissociate diasporic Syrian-ness from the idea of a fixed homeland. While structuralism avoids ambiguity at the cost of being a theory of representation with no space for human agency, ambiguity is acceptable as a result when the subject is analysed through a post-structuralist approach.[1006] When dealing with diaspora, subjectivity has to be taken into account, despite the natural propensity of the diasporic subject towards mixed feelings. Melancholia and nostalgia create a diasporic micro-world in which interpretive dimensions are altered.

"To be Syrian first" and "Syria is my home country" are the main indications used for the feeling of belonging in Syrian diasporans in Armenia and Australia. The predominance of Syrian identity does not contrast with the multi-layered fluidity of Syrian identity in general and does not necessarily imply lack of integration in the host country. Being Syrian first, above all, means that Syrians in diaspora prioritise their attachment to Syria in the emotional, social and political sphere. The outbreak of the conflict in Syria was a determinant in the construction of Syrian diasporic communities in the two countries selected for the case studies: Australia as an extensive case study and Armenia as the influential case study. The sectarianisation and the severe political instability that came with it played an important role in the formation of Syrian national consciousness in exile. Nationalist feelings surrounding a "great", "strong" and "united Syria" are also a contrasting reaction to the current use of divisive politics in Syria.

At the same time, there is the need to explain what appears as an ambiguity between group feelings and nationalist stances. The ambivalence of Syrian diasporic political identity emerges, particularly from the Australian case study. On the one hand, the identity is oriented towards the common narrative of sectarian harmony in a secular sense, well conveyed by the recurrent expression "*Syria is not a sectarian country; Syrian people do not care about religion in public*".[1007] On the other hand, it is polarised around Sunni versus minorities discourse. Religious identity directly influences political stands in diaspora, with Syrian Sunnis generally backing

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[1006] Gilbert, G. (2010). "The sad state of post-structuralism." *L'Esprit Créateur,* 50 (3), 129-143.
[1007] Survey results (Australia and Armenia).

opposition groups and minorities supporting the current regime. The trend replicates in a simplified way the political debate in and around Syria.

Ambivalence of attachments is not new in the history of long-distance Syrian nationalism. Ambivalent loyalties repeatedly occurred in times of political instability, crisis, conflict and rebellion in the Syrian homeland. Syrians in exile took part in other occasions to fight for the establishment of Syria as an independent political entity. For instance, during the First World War, nationalists outside Syria organised different forms of activism to bring international attention to the imperialistic nature of France's Syrian Mandate. [1008] Their anti-colonial struggle did not always correspond ideologically to the struggle taking place in the homeland.[1009]

Similar historic examples indicate the existence of cross-cutting identities before the conflict in Syria and in diaspora. The political structure and culture was not formed around confessional lines and primordial affiliations.[1010] The Syrian regime did not seek to promote confessional politics (with the exception of the use of sectarian politics in the Hama uprising), and wanted to escape the minority dimension and to avoid the politicisation of religious groups. Primordial identities were not salient in Syrian politics prior to the uprising. [1011] Cross-cutting identities are observable also in the two diasporas of the present study, with some Armenian Christians criticising the regime despite the mutual agreement between al-Assad and the Armenian community of Syria, some Syrian Christians supporting Sunnis in Australia in the demonstrations for a political change, and some Sunni Syrians supporting the political *status quo.*

Ultimately, the divisions amongst diasporans are first and foremost political rather than religious. The coincidence between religious and political loyalties is also the outcome of the sectarianisation and Islamisation of the conflict that has led to highly religiously polarised political stances. Pro-Assad views perceive the regime as the national guarantor of minorities' rights, of religious tolerance and of political stability, while the rebels are perceived as those who seek to subvert and divide the country. Pro-opposition approaches see al-Assad as a dictator and a "war criminal" and support opposition groups for the democratisation of the country.

[1008] Fahrenthold (2014), p. 335.
[1009] Fahrenthold (2014).
[1010] Khatib (2017), p. 6.
[1011] Khatib (2017).

The two opposing positions have in common the support for a secular Syria and the disregard for sectarianism, regardless of the position towards the regime. There are likely to be different views and different degrees of secularism in Syria, which are difficult to measure even with a socio-political approach. Some participants saw the imposition of secularism from above as non-recognition of the majority religion in Syria and as a lack of freedom of expression, given the impossibility of talking about religion in public. On the contrary, the majority of participants in this study believed that the secular formula was oriented towards authentic pluralism and religious freedom. Either way, secularism is perceived as a suitable political solution for religious diversity and for deterring sectarian tensions in Syria. Secularism and sectarianism are, in this sense, contrasting discourses both reflecting Syrian religious and ethnic heterogeneity.

8.3 Basic principles from empirical knowledge

Can it be determined that religious affiliations of Syrian groups impede the formation of national belonging and of a coherent Syrian identity in diaspora?

The final step of enquiry is to incorporate empirical evidence back into the theories, as a form of induction, and extract general principles from the particular notions derived by empirical results. The final aim is to look for the most fundamental principles and the "best explanation",[1012] which is: there is a dichotomy between politics of identity in Syria (manipulation of Syrian identity from above) and the formation of Syrian identities from below. In particular, the dichotomy is represented by a weak political Syrian nationalism in Syria and a strong Syrian national belonging in diaspora. In the host country, there is a simplified replication of the Syrian mosaic that endemically functions in Syrian society. With this, an endemic tension amongst Syrian groups should not be assumed. The tension is the result of political and social circumstances in Syria and in the host countries.

Syrian identity starts from group identity, rather than super-national identities like pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism that politically aim to downplay the importance of different communities. In deducing the consequences of the hypothesis it is possible to conclude that the interaction and the coexistence of diverse religious groups reflects humanity and it is not a reason for political and social instability.

[1012] Fann (1970).

Rather, the manipulation of identity is salient in periods of political instability and conflict. Thus, the definition of the Syrian society as divided and uncooperative, experiencing a latent and inherent antagonism amongst religious and ethnic groups, with the Syrian sectarian "social mosaic" as the primary issue in Syria, is inappropriate.

Traditional political theories around primordial politics have not been effective in explaining the resurgence of group identities based on ethnicity, language, race, tradition, religion and region. In Syrian society all these factors are at stake. Multiple facets and faces of Syrian identity are in place and groups created different cross-cutting coalitions.[1013] Assuming that groups are flexible political and social actors and despite predictions that with the nation-state formation ethnic groups would gradually disappear or lose relevance in favour of the national community, group identity can become salient without subverting national loyalty. A change in the balance of social forces implies a crisis in the relationships between the state and society[1014] that can cause political struggles around ethnicity and religion.

The difficulty of linking Syrian identity to univocal political trusts lies in the fluid and multi-layered nature of group and national attachments.[1015] Identity is an important but not sufficient parameter to define political coalitions in Syria and in exile. Personal interest emerges as a more explicative indicator: political choices influenced by identities depend on social context in the sense that they are designed to maximise pay-offs. Pay-offs are not only and necessarily material, but they can also include non-material ends such as prestige, social acceptance and protection in diaspora.[1016] The easiest and most direct way to achieve this in periods of political uncertainty is to rely on the group in the form of an extended nepotism.[1017] The social and political trust in the group is more likely to occur in periods of political instability, with lack of legitimacy in the ruling class and politics of discrimination.

The role of cultural pressures cannot be neglected, because it influences the perception of a common threat and the definition of the common interest. Mobilisation can occur in defence or promotion of self-defined interests.[1018] In the

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[1013] Doornbos (1991), p. 57.
[1014] Hall (1986), p. 11.
[1015] Doornbos (1991), p. 57.
[1016] Posner (2005), p. 11.
[1017] Van den Berghe (1981).
[1018] Gurr (2000), p. 6.

case of Syrian Armenians in Armenia, there was the need to assert the distinctiveness of the "Syrian way to be Armenian" for economic, social and cultural reasons, which resulted in a strengthened national identity and re-dimensioned ethnic identity. In Australia, multicultural pre-existing structures of institutionalised religious and/or ethnic identities overlapped political divisions between pro-Assad and pro-opposition blocs. Political divergences corresponding to religious separations result from the explicit use of the minority versus majority card in Syria.

As expected in non-reductionism, the minority/majority divide manipulated in Syrian politics is not passively absorbed in the diasporic political debate, though. Despite polarised views, political attitudes in both the case studies converge towards national and inclusive secular governance, associated with the importance of minority rights in Syria and the recognition of the religion of the majority. The protection of minorities is not considered to be repressive of the majority on a neutral political ground, not even under the minority rule. Group hierarchy-based discrimination on the part of the regime, based on asserting the Arab and secular identity of the nation as a way to prevent political opposition, caused discontent around group identity. This occurred both for some minorities like Assyrians and a portion of the Sunni majority at the same time. Thus, commonality of interests might supersede majority/minority memberships.

What is currently missing in Syria and in diaspora is not a united population, but a political agenda that could be acceptable regardless of sectarian constraints. Neither the regime nor rebel groups alone can provide an acceptable agenda at the moment. Assad's ethno-politics, despite its stated goal of tolerance and harmony in the private sphere, was not driven towards socio-political integration of communities into the state and within the state with each other. The conflict between the dominant and the subordinate groups causes increased ethnic and religious differentiation. [1019] The political agenda of the opposing blocs lacks "ethic content", to use Gramsci's words, because the factions are oriented to their self-assertion before the interests of their people. Self-interest is typical of the primitivist stage of a ruling class, in Gramscian terms, even more so in the minority rule. Not surprisingly, self-interest and saliency of identity drives individuals and groups by reflex.

[1019] Doornbos (1991), p. 63.

8.4 Final remarks: limitations and consequences of this study

This research has brought diasporic communities back into the history of Syrian nation building they were once excluded from or, especially in the case of Armenians, perceived as hostile to Syrian-ness. Properly because the perspectives of diasporans have been positioned at the very core of the evidence for this study, the validity of the research is subject to the limitations of the empirical knowledge acquired during fieldwork. These include the effect of temporal and spatial constraints on the expressed views and the nature of participation, so that the interpretation heavily relies on geographic and moment-based context.

In Armenia and Australia, diasporic communities provided for the needs of security, self-esteem and social status that were missing in Syria. Diasporans relied on ethnic and sectarian solidarity, which was the first available assistance. The revival of group attachments did not prevent feelings of national belonging, from a diasporic perspective. Group feelings go through phases of rise and fall, are context-specific and fluid, to the extent that they are social constructs that are "primordial" solely because they are given from birth (*ab origine*), inherited by the family and culturally preserved.

The narratives of return and attachment give shape to diverse ways of being Syrian that supplant the interpretation of the Syrian social mosaic as composed of isolated blocks, intolerant of each other. In the eyes of diasporans, the mosaic is a category of practice, which works to keep groups together. The recurrent response *"Syria is a mosaic supporting each other"* [1020] undermines the classic view that individuals and groups, including sectarian groups, can exist in isolation from each other. Especially in a society like the Syrian one, Christians and Muslims, Islamic sects and ethnic groups, had many occasions to cooperate and not only to coexist. Despite the political polarisation of identities, there is, fundamentally, a spirit of cooperation "against the foreigner" and agreement for an "independent and indivisible Syria". [1021]

More attention should be paid to the role of ethnic and religious heterogeneity for nation building, by taking into account the emotional depth of national identity. Members of ethnic or religious minorities do not always show less affection toward

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[1020] Miscellaneous interviews.
[1021] Miscellaneous interviews.

the state than the dominant group.[1022] Syrian national identity from below in diaspora shows that a fruitful integration between group and national attachments is possible. Ethno-religious diversity is compatible with stable government, when the latter exercise legitimate power. A democratic government remains problematic when the ruling class is drawn from a religious minority as in the Syrian minority rule.

The events of the Syrian war are influencing and transforming the way Syrian people conceive themselves and their interrelations. The change of Syrian identity before and after the outbreak of the conflict is complex to determine because the war is not over yet. Furthermore, even though respondents are asked about the perception of Syrian society before and after the conflict, their responses are still *a posteriori,* influenced by the latest events. What is missing (and impossible to obtain) for a secure comparison is empirical research on Syrian social identity in Syria before the conflict. For such reason, social research on Syrian identity in diaspora settings cannot provide conclusions, but rather starting points for the evaluation of social and political Syrian-ness.

After the end of the war, there will be the need to re-construct Syrian national identity, since sectarian narratives, polarisation, risks of national fragmentation and dispersion have led to a crisis of Syrian national identity at the political and social level. The political crisis of identity is different to the social one: in the political one, identity is an interchangeable instrument of power; in the social one, identity is the expression of humanity, resilience and patriotism. From the story of diasporic belonging presented in this thesis, it is clear that despite the weaknesses of its formulations at the political level, national identity is meaningful for Syrian people. The pan-Arab projects of the Ba'ath Party for dictating the identity of the Syrian nation have failed. What is the future of Syria in terms of reconstructing the meaning of the nation? The size of the refugee crisis and the persistence of the link between diaspora and the homeland would justify the involvement of diasporic communities in the future national dialogue for post-war Syria addressing such issues.

Despite its limited validity, the empirical knowledge emerging from this research is reliable and suitable for being used in future studies of Syrian diasporans in other countries. Further fieldwork with activist groups, Syrian associations and members of the Syrian community in host lands like Turkey, Sweden, Germany and Canada,

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[1022] Doornbos (1991), p. 81.

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would be beneficial for broadening the analysis of Syrian diasporic mobilisation.

Despite the differences amongst the three contexts, Armenia, Australia and Syria share the problematic nature of national identity formation. More broadly, political discourses around national, ethnic and religious identities are extremely powerful in periods of global political instability and insecurity such as that in which we live. However, identity in politics might become a corollary of status, class, access to resources, and politics of advantage and disadvantage. The two specific case studies confirm this and can offer insights for understanding the emergence of politics of identity worldwide.

The state of politics of belonging from above in Syria and elsewhere is a sad one. Nationalist propagandas incite restrictions to immigration, new secessionist claims, neo-fascist sympathies and racist attitudes. The cohesive and human aspects of community and nation building demonstrated by Syrian immigrant communities give hope that the roots of national identity can make the richness of ethnic and religious diversity flourish despite divisive politics. In the age of restrictive nationalisms, creative and positive modes of national belonging are not only possible, but also necessary. Syrians are a perfect example of multiple and fluid senses of belonging to *a* nation, aside from the tyranny of *the* nation.

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Appendix 1: Participant Classification

Participant Classification Sheet (Armenia)

Citizenship	Place of birth	Years in Armenia	Employment	Religion	Bio
1. Syrian	Aleppo	5	Jeweller	Apostolic Christian	M, 53y
2. Syrian	Aleppo	5	Unemployed	Apostolic Christian	M, 41y
3. Syrian	Aleppo	5	Shoemaker	Apostolic Christian	M, 51y
4. Syrian Armenian	Aleppo	5-10	Salesman	Apostolic Christian	M, 53y
5. Syrian Armenian	Kuwait	5-10	Tradesman	Apostolic Christian	M, 50y
6. Syrian Armenian	Aleppo	5-10	Software Engineer	Apostolic Christian	M, 32y
7. Syrian Armenian	Aleppo	5	Housewife	Apostolic Christian	F, 52y
8. Syrian Armenian	Aleppo	5	Housewife	Apostolic Christian	F, 60y
9. Syrian	Aleppo	5-10	Housewife	Apostolic Christian	F, 36y
10. Syrian	Aleppo	5-10	Unemployed	Apostolic Christian	F, 38y
11. Syrian Armenian	Aleppo	5	Unemployed	Apostolic Christian	F, 42y
12.	Aleppo	5-10	Unemployed	Apostolic Christian	F, 32y
13. Syrian	Aleppo	5-10	Tourist guide	Apostolic Christian	F, 50y
14. Syrian	Aleppo	5-10	Waiter	Apostolic Christian	M, 25y
15. Syrian	Damascus	5	Employee	Apostolic Christian	F, 35y
16. Armenian	Aleppo	5	Housewife	Apostolic Christian	F, 58y
17. Syrian Armenian	Aleppo	5	Hairdresser	Apostolic Christian	M, 33y
18. Syrian Armenian	Aleppo	5-10	Employee	Apostolic Christian	F, 45y
19. Syrian Armenian	Aleppo	5-10	Unemployed	Apostolic Christian	F, 39y
20. Syrian Armenian	Aleppo	5	Unemployed	Apostolic Christian	M, 65y
21.	Aleppo	5-10	Student	Apostolic Christian	M, 22y
22.	Aleppo	5-10	Pharmacist	Apostolic Christian	M, 33y
23.	Aleppo	5-10	Jeweller	Apostolic Christian	M, 50y
24.	Aleppo	5	Jeweller	Apostolic Christian	M, 30y
25.	Aleppo	10+	Student	Apostolic Christian	M, 27y
26. Syrian Armenian	Jordan	5-10	Hairdresser	Apostolic Christian	M, 24y

	Citizenship					
27.	Syrian Armenian	Aleppo	5-10	Student	Apostolic Christian	M, 19
28.	Syrian Armenian	Aleppo	5	Salesman	Apostolic Christian	M, 60y
29.	Syrian	Aleppo	5-10	Nurse	Apostolic Christian	M, 26y
30.	Armenian	Aleppo	25+	Employee	Apostolic Christian	M, 34y
31.	Syrian	Aleppo	5	Student, Arabic teacher	Evangelic	F, 30y
32.	Syrian	Aleppo	5-10	Student	Apostolic Christian	F, 22y
33.	Syrian	Aleppo	5	Student, Arabic teacher	Evangelic	F, 30y
34.	Syrian	Aleppo	5-10	Housewife, Housewife	Apostolic Christian	F, 65y
35.	Syrian	Aleppo	5	Dressmaker	Apostolic Christian	F, 65y
36.	Syrian	Tal Abiad	5	Housewife	Apostolic Christian	F, 49y
37.	Syrian	Aleppo	5-10	Housewife	Apostolic Christian	F, 56y
38.	Syrian	Aleppo	5-10	Housewife	Apostolic Christian	F, 45y
39.	Syrian	Aleppo	5-10	Housewife	Apostolic Christian	F, 59y
40.	Syrian	Aleppo	5-10	Housewife	Apostolic Christian	F, 45y
41.	Syrian	Aleppo	5	Housewife	Apostolic Christian	F, 65y
42.	Syrian	Aleppo	5-10	Housewife	Apostolic Christian	F, 56y
43.	Syrian	Aleppo	5-10	Unemployed	Catholic Christian	F, 54y
44.	Syrian	Aleppo	5	Unemployed	Apostolic Christian	F, 46y
45.	Syrian	Aleppo	5	Unemployed	Catholic Christian	F, 54y
46.	Syrian	Aleppo	5	Housewife	Apostolic Christian	F, 62y
47.	Syrian	Aleppo	5-10	Housewife,	Apostolic Christian	F, 60y
48.	Syrian	Aleppo	5	Unemployed	Apostolic Christian	F, 45y

Participant Classification Sheet (Australia)

	Citizenship	Place of birth	Years in Australia	Employment in Australia	Religion	Bio
1.	Syrian Australian	Hama	10+	Engineer, Teacher	Sunni Muslim	M, 63y
2.	Syrian Australian	Aleppo	10+	Priest	Melkite Christian	M, 53y
3.	Syrian Australian	Der'a	10+	Engineer	Christian	F, 66y
4.	Syrian Australian	Der'a	10+		Sunni Muslim	F, 52y
5.	Syrian	Syria	10+	Teacher	Catholic	F, 25y

					Christian	
6.	Syrian Australian	Syria	10+	Student	Christian	M, 32y
7.	Syrian Australian	Syria	10+	Student	Christian	M, 36y
8.	Australian	Syria	10+	Student	Christian	M, 26y
9.	Syrian Australian	Der'a	10+	Teacher	Sunni Muslim	M, 63y
10.	Syrian Australian	Homs	10+	Seller	Christian	M, 60y
11.	Syrian Australian	Central Syria	10+	Worker	Alawi (Shia) Muslim	M, 73y
12.	Syrian Australian	Homs	10+	Seller	Sunni Muslim	F, 52y
13.	Syrian Australian	Homs (village)	10+	Housewife	Alawi (Shia) Muslim	F, 66y
14.	Syrian	Homs	5	Student	Sunni Muslim	M, 28y
15.	Syrian Lebanese Australian	Tripoli	10+	Security Guard	Alawi (Shia) Muslim	M, 61y
16.	Syrian Australian	N/A	10+	Teacher	Alawi (Shia) Muslim	F, 34y
17.	Syrian Australian	N/A	5-10	Housewife	Christian	F, 54y
18.	Syrian Australian	Damascus	5-10	Social worker	Christian	F, 48y
19.	Syrian Australian	Tartous	5-10	Social worker	Christian	F, 31y
20.	Australian	Aleppo	10+	Volunteer	Armenian Apostolic Christian	F, 49y
21.	Syrian	Village (Krak de Chavaliers)	5	Interpreter	Christian Orthodox	F, 36y
22.	Syrian	Village (Krak de Chavaliers)	5	Interpreter	Christian Orthodox	F, 33y
23.	Syrian	Damascus	5-10	Scientist	Sunni Muslim	M, 51y
24.	Australian	Damascus	10+	Associate Professor	Sunni Muslim	M, 63y
25.	Syrian	Syria	10+	Painter	Christian Orthodox	M, 45y
26.	Syrian	Damascus	10+	Dentist	Christian Orthodox	F, 36y
27.	Syrian	Damascus	5	Dentist	Christian Orthodox	M, 38y
28.	Syrian	Syria	10+	Marketing consultant	Armenian Apostolic Christian	F, 49y
29.	Syrian	Syria	10+	Marketing consultant	Armenian Apostolic Christian	M, 54y
30.	Syrian	Syria	10+	Accounting Manager	Christian Orthodox	M, 38y
31.	Syrian Australian	Syria	10+	Housewife	Christian Orthodox	F, 40y
32.	Syrian	Aleppo	5	Housewife	Christian Orthodox	F, 42y

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33. Syrian	Aleppo	5	Builder	Christian Orthodox	M, 56y
34. Syrian	Aleppo	5	Housewife	Christian	F, 39y
35. Syrian	Aleppo	5	Housewife	Christian	F, 53y
36. Syrian	Aleppo	5	Housewife	Christian	F, 43y
37. Syrian	Aleppo	5	Chef	Sunni Muslim	M, 41y

Appendix 2: Questionnaire (English)

"Syria in the mirror"

Part I: IDENTITY

1) _____ **Please define your nationality** _____

2) _____ **Where were you born?** _____

3) _____ **Language/s spoken at home?** _____

4) _____ **How long have you been living in Australia/Armenia? (Circle one letter)**

   a. less than 1 year

   b. from 1 to 5 years

   c. more than 5 years

   d. more than 10 years

5) _____ **Could you put your identity affiliations in a scale of importance (1=the most important)**

   a. Australian   1 □   2 □   3 □   4 □   5 □

   b. Syrian   1 □   2 □   3 □   4 □   5 □

   c. Christian   1 □   2 □   3 □   4 □   5 □

   d. Muslim   1 □   2 □   3 □   4 □   5 □

   e. Sunni   1 □   2 □   3 □   4 □   5 □

   f. Shiite   1 □   2 □   3 □   4 □   5 □

   g. Alawite   1 □   2 □   3 □   4 □   5 □

   h. Druze   1 □   2 □   3 □   4 □   5 □

   i. Armenian   1 □   2 □   3 □   4 □   5 □

   j. Arab   1 □   2 □   3 □   4 □   5 □

6) _____ **What do you get back from your community? (Circle one or more letters)**

   a. Solidarity

   b. Assistance (please specify what kind _____)

   c. Preferred treatment

   d. Social relations

   e. Other benefits (please specify _____)

7) _____ **What do you do or feel for your community? (Circle one or more letters)**

   a. Solidarity

   b. Compassion

c.   Disposition to help members of my communities before others

d.   Same feelings as I feel for other human beings

Part II: SYRIA

1)   _____   **Do you follow the events in Syria?**   **Yes □   No □**

2)   _____   **Which of these definitions does describe the situation in Syria at best? (Circle one letter)**

a.   Civil war

b.   Sectarian violence

c.   External invasion

d.   International conflict

e.   Uprising of the Arab Spring

f.   I do not know (Please give reasons _____)

3)   _____   **How closely have you followed the events in Syria and helped Syrian people since the outbreak of the conflict? (Circle one or more letters if applicable)**

_____

a.   Humanitarian assistance

b.   Donations (public – via no profit organizations or private)

c.   Public manifestations

d.   Exchange of information

e.   Contact with Syrian people

f.   Other(please specify _____)

Please provide details (organizations, dates, amounts, descriptions of support…)

_____   **_____**

4)   _____   **Rate the following definition of the regime in Syria? (1 is the most representative)**

a. Secular party	1 □	2 □	3 □	4 □	5 □
b. Authoritarian	1 □	2 □	3 □	4 □	5 □
c. Secular and authoritarian	1 □	2 □	3 □	4 □	5 □
d. Sectarian	1 □	2 □	3 □	4 □	5 □
e. Protective of minorities	1 □	2 □	3 □	4 □	5 □
f. Repressive of majority	1 □	2 □	3 □	4 □	5 □

g.   Other (please specify _____)

5) _____ **What is Syria right now? (Circle one letter)**

  a. A failed State

  b. A Nation

  c. A mix of territories

6) _____ **What was before the war? (Circle one letter)**

  a. A strong State

  b. A Nation

  c. A territory united by a border

7) _____ **A future proposal for Syria: To what extent do you agree with the following policies? (if neutral, please do not express your preference)**

  a. Islamic State   strongly agree □   agree □   disagree □   strongly disagree □

  b. The resistance of the regime   strongly agree □   agree □   disagree □   strongly disagree □

  c. A secular government   strongly agree □   agree □   disagree □   strongly disagree □

  d. Democracy   strongly agree □   agree □   disagree □   strongly disagree □

  e. Foreign intervention   strongly agree □   agree □   disagree □   strongly disagree □

  f. Greater Syria   strongly agree □   agree □   disagree □   strongly disagree □

  g. Pan-Arabism   strongly agree □   agree □   disagree □   strongly disagree □

8) _____ **Would you like to go back to Syria one day?**   **Yes □**   **No □**

  _____ **If yes, for which purposes?**

  a. Tourism

  b. Visiting

  c. Living

  d. Business

  e. Other (please specify _____)

9) _____ **Under what conditions would you return to Syria? (Circle one or more)**

  a. End of the war

  b. Fall of the regime

  c. Syria is a safe state

  d. Economic growth

  e. Democratic government

  f. Protection and representation for minorities

  Explain why you wish to return

  _____

  Explain why you do not wish to return

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_____

What do Syrian people need most right now? Please write down your suggestions

_____
_____
_____
_____

Part III: Biographic

1)   **Employment (job)**

    a.   in Syria (if applicable)

    b.   in Armenia/Australia

Name	_____	Nationality	_____
Place of Birth	_____	Date	_____
Age	_____	Gender	M ☐ F ☐
Job Title	_____	Languages	_____

Appendix 3: Questionnaire (Arabic)

<div dir="rtl">

سورية عبر المرآة

القسم الأول: الهوية

1) _____ عرف عن هويتك _____

2) _____ مكان الولادة _____

3) _____ اللغة التي تتكلم بها بالبيت _____

4) _____ من كم سنة تعيش في أستراليا، أرمينيا؟

   a. أقل من سنة

   b. بين سنة و خمس سنوات

   c. أكثر خمس سنوات

   d. أكثر عشر سنوات

5) _____ أشر انتمائك حسب الأهمية (1 هو الأكثر تمثيلا)

	1	2	3	4	5	
a.	1 □	2 □	3 □	4 □	5 □	أسترالي
b.	1 □	2 □	3 □	4 □	5 □	سوري
c.	1 □	2 □	3 □	4 □	5 □	مسيحي
d.	1 □	2 □	3 □	4 □	5 □	مسلم
e.	1 □	2 □	3 □	4 □	5 □	سني
f.	1 □	2 □	3 □	4 □	5 □	شيعي
g.	1 □	2 □	3 □	4 □	5 □	علوي
h.	1 □	2 □	3 □	4 □	5 □	درزي
i.	1 □	2 □	3 □	4 □	5 □	أرمني
j.	1 □	2 □	3 □	4 □	5 □	عربي

6) _____ بماذا يفيدك مجتمعك ؟

   a. تضامن

   b. المساعدة (يرجى تحديد أي نوع _____ (

   c. معاملة مميزة

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d. علاقات اجتماعية

e. فوائد اخرى (يرجى تحديد أي نوع _____)

_____ 7) ماذا تشعر بناحية مجتمعك؟

a. تضامن

b. إشفاق

c. مساعدة أفراد المجتمع قبل الآخرين

d. نفس المشاعر نحو بقية البشر

القسم الثاني: سورية

_____ 1) هل تتابع الأحداث في سوريا؟   نعم ☐ لا ☐

_____ 2) أي من هذه التعريفات تصف بالفعل الوضع في سوريا ؟

a. حرب اهلية

b. العنف الطائفي

c. غزو خارجي

d. صراع دولي

e. انتفاضة الربيع العربي

f. لا أعرف (يرجى إعطاء أسباب _____)

_____ 3) ما مدة اهتمامك في وضع سوريا؟

_____

a. مساعدات إنسانية

b. التبرعات (العامة أو عن طريق المنظمات الإنسانية أو خاصة)

c. الأشتراك بالمظاهرات العامة

d. تبادل المعلومات

e. الاتصال مع الشعب السوري

f. أخرى (يرجى التحديد _____)

يرجى تقديم تفاصيل (أسماء المؤسسات للدعم ، التكرر، قدر المبالغ)

_____ _____

_____ 6) معدل التعريف التالي للنظام في سوريا؟ (1 هو الأكثر تمثيلا)

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a.	5 □	4 □	3 □	2 □	1 □	حزب علماني	
b.	5 □	4 □	3 □	2 □	1 □	استبدادي	
c.	5 □	4 □	3 □	2 □	1 □	علماني واستبدادي	
d.	5 □	4 □	3 □	2 □	1 □	طائفي	
e.	5 □	4 □	3 □	2 □	1 □	حامي الأقليات	
f.	5 □	4 □	3 □	2 □	1 □	يقمع الأكثرية	
g.			(يرجى التحديد _____)			اخرى	

‫7)‬ _____ ما هي سوريا في الوقت الراهن؟

a. دولة فاشلة

b. أمة

c. مزيج من الأراضي

‫8)‬ _____ ماذا كانت قبل الحرب؟ (جواب واحد)

a. دولة قوية

b. أمة

c. أرض موحدة بحدود

‫9)‬ _____ عبارة مناسبة من أجل تعريف مستقبل سوريا:

a. دولة الإسلامية   أوافق بشدة □ أوافق □ لا أوافق □ لا أوافق بشدة □

b. النظام الحالي   أوافق بشدة □ أوافق □ لا أوافق □ لا أوافق بشدة □

c. حكومة علمانية   أوافق بشدة □ أوافق □ لا أوافق □ لا أوافق بشدة □

d. ديمقراطية   أوافق بشدة □ أوافق □ لا أوافق □ لا أوافق بشدة □

e. التدخل الأجنبي   أوافق بشدة □ أوافق □ لا أوافق □ لا أوافق بشدة □

سورية العظمة   أوافق بشدة □ أوافق □ لا أوافق □ لا أوافق بشدة □   الآمة العربية
أوافق بشدة □ أوافق □ لا أوافق □ لا أوافق بشدة □

‫10)‬ _____ هل ترغب بالعودة إلى سوريا يوماً؟   نعم □ لا □

_____ إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم، لأي غرض؟

a. للسياحة

b. للزيارة

c. للإقامة

d. للعمل

e. ‏_____) اخرى (يرجى التحديد

‏_____ 12) ‏تحت أي ظروف تريد العودة إلى سوريا؟ (جواب واحد)

a. ‏نهاية الحرب

b. ‏سقوط النظام

c. ‏دولة آمنة

d. ‏النمو الاقتصادي

e. ‏حكومة ديمقراطية

f. ‏حماية وتمثيل الأقليات

‏اشرح لماذا ترغب بالعودة

‏_____

‏اشرح لماذا لا ترغب بالعودة

‏_____

‏ما مستقبل تتوقع لسوريا؟

‏_____

‏أكثرحاجة الآن اليها الشعب السوري؟ اكتب افكارك

‏_____

‏القسم الثالث: السيرة الذاتية

‏_____ 1) ‏الوظيفة (العمل)

a. ‏في سوريا ‏_____

b. ‏في أرمنيا | استراليا ‏_____

الجنسية _____ الأسم _____

التاريخ _____ مكان الولادة _____

الجنس ذكر □ انثى □ _____ العمر _____

_____ _____

Appendix 4: Interview guide

INTERVIEW*

*These questions are only indicative of the themes that might be arisen during the conversation. The interview will be in the form of depth-interview, which requires the minimum intervention by the interviewer. The order, the formulation and the occurrence of the questions will be determined by the progression of the interview itself.

1. Can you talk about your settlement in Australia (your job? Do you feel integrated?)/ Armenia and your background?

2. How would you define your group or community identity? (sect, religious community, ethnic group)

3. Could you describe what is happening in Syria since the uprising of the conflict?

4. How do you think the situation has evolved?

5. Which is your main source of information about the events in Syria?

6. Do you belong to a Syrian minority/community? Which one?

7. Do you know about the condition of your community in Syria nowadays?

8. Do you know how the condition was before 2011?

9. How do you see Syria in ten year time? And Afterwards?

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