Sectarianism in Alawi Syria: Exploring the Paradoxes of Politics and Religion

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Sectarianism in Alawi Syria: Exploring the Paradoxes of Politics and Religion

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Abstract

The religious and the political intertwine in all sectarian conflicts and the violent conflagration in Syria is no exception. However, sectarianism as an explanatory paradigm is extremely limited; it provides a monolithic reading of a complex phenomenon with a well-established historical pedigree. This paper traces the manifestation of the sectarian dimensions of the conflict, following the development of the heterodox Alawi community from a marginalized sect to its ascendance as Syria’s ruling class. It focuses on how sectarian identity has constantly been exploited by hegemonic powers such as the Sunni Ottomans, the French Colonisers and, most recently, the Asad regime. The paper suggests that the only escape from the sectarian minefield is the entrenchment of a strong Syrian national identity within the framework of equal citizenship, pluralistic democracy and the protection of minority rights. This could potentially limit the interference of outside parties, but such an outcome is over-optimistic at the current juncture since vested interests outweigh the interests of internal peace and stability.

Introduction

On the 31st of May 2013, as the civil war in Syria escalated to unprecedented levels, Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi—arguably one of the twenty-first century’s most influential Sunni Reformist scholars—ascended the pulpit of the ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab Mosque in the Qatari capital Doha and pronounced:

The Nusayris are more disbelieving than the Jews and the Christians, as Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah said about them. We see them today killing people like mice and cats, by the thousands and tens of thousands. Asad has come to rule by his own authority and with him his Nusayri sect.1

With these provocative words, al-Qaradawi urged Muslims all over the world to make their way to the besieged Syrian town of Qusayr to lend a hand to the Syrian Opposition fighting against the Asad Regime and its Lebanese Shi’ite Islamist allies, Hizbullah.

The Sunni religious establishment was, however, not unique in providing religious justification for intervening in the Syrian crisis. In response to a question pertaining to seeking parental consent to travel to Syria to defend the burial site of Sayyidah Zaynab, the daughter of Imam ‘Ali—the last of the righteous caliphs and the first Imam according to Twelver Shi’ite doctrine—Ayatollah Seyed Kazem Haeri ruled that parental permission for such matters was not necessary.2 In an earlier pronouncement, one of Haeri’s peers, Ayatollah Seyed Mohammad Sadegh Rouhani—also based at the influential seminary town of Qom in Iran—went even further, legitimizing jihad in Syria for the purpose of protecting Shi’ite holy sites and regarding individuals killed in the process as

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martyrs. These and other similar *fatwas* resulted in the opening of official registration sites in Iran serving the purpose of facilitating travel to Syria to participate in the *jihad.*

Acute polarization is a natural consequence of intense conflicts, but taking recourse to sharp sectarian polemics not only fuels the flames of religious hatred, it also ultimately reduces complex political phenomena to dogmatically sealed interpretations that severely impede our understanding. A careful reading of the history of the Alawi community in Syria, therefore, presents an opportunity to interrogate the way in which the religious and the political intertwine and will hopefully shed some light upon the current impasse in the country and the region. An appropriate point of departure is to examine how the Alawi community came into being, what its beliefs are and how these have impacted upon its history and its evolution as a political community.

The Birth of the Nusayriyyah (Alawi) Sect

**Historical Evolution**

The emergence of clearly defined doctrinal schools within the Islamic tradition was the product of an intellectual and socio-political ferment that took several centuries to crystallize. Importantly, the origins of the Sunni-Shi‘ite division within Islam are clearly attributable to a political dispute over leadership in the nascent Muslim community that resulted in the assassination of the third Caliph of Islam—‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān—and the splitting of the Muslim community between his supporters and those of the fourth Caliph, ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib. However, it is only over the course of the next 300 years that the two schools were separated by distinctive systems of belief. As such, doctrinal polemics between Sunnis and Shi‘ites are a relatively late phenomenon. The Sunni doctrinal school of the *ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama‘ah* (followers of the Prophetic Practice and Community) emerged through contestation between traditional scholars of the Prophetic teachings (*ahl al-Hadīth*) and Mutazilite scholars that propounded a brand of Islamic rationalism that was strongly influenced by Persian and Greek philosophies. The Mutazilites were supported by the ‘Abbasid Court and the latter tried to enforce their beliefs as official doctrine, resulting in a strong backlash from the traditional establishment, led by ‘Abmad ibn Hanbal. It is in the writings of Ibn Hanbal that the term *ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama‘ah* makes one of its earliest appearances in relation to a distinctive Sunni doctrinal school.

In a similar fashion, the Shi‘ite doctrine of *al-Imāmah*—belief in the Infallible Leader—also took hundreds of years to find clear articulation, finally becoming the central pillar of Twelver Shi‘ite belief. It is therefore not surprising to find that early Shi‘ite polemics were focused on internal differences. The Iraqi cities of Kufah and Baghdad became central points for the various Shi‘ite orientations and were also the sphere within which some of the early extremist Shi‘ite sects emerged. A very rich portrayal of this is provided by the Shi‘ite Scholar al-Hasan ibn Mūsa an-Nawbakhtī (d. 300–310H/912–922 CE) in his book *Firaq ash-Shi‘ah,* which is one of the oldest extant works of Twelver Shi‘ite doctrine. It is also in this specific work that we have one of the earliest accounts of the Nusayriyyah, who would become known as Alawis in the early twentieth century and whose evolution into a clearly definable religious sect was also the product of a considerable amount of time.

Prior to the division of the Islamic world into nation-states in the twentieth century, religious belief was the primary identity marker for the people of this realm. As such, the subjects of the various Islamic empires were differentiated and grouped according
to their religious affiliations. This pattern was eventually institutionalized by the Ottomans (sixteenth to the twentieth century) and came to be known as the millet system. However, even before this, religious belief was the basis for differentiating Alawis from other confessional groups and it is, therefore, important to briefly present the main aspects of their faith.

As Mahmud Faksh points out, the Alawi religion crystallized in the tenth and eleventh centuries as a mixture of various Islamic and non-Islamic beliefs and practices, which he summarizes as follows:

First, from paganism the Alawis adopted the idea of a divine triad, of its successive manifestations in the seven cycles of world history, and of the transmigration of souls. God revealed himself to the world seven different times: each time with two persons who, with God, made a holy trinity. The Alawis also believe that at first all Alawis were stars in the world of light, into which a virtuous Alawi is transformed upon death. A sinning Alawi becomes a Jew, Muslim or Christian.

Second, from Shi’a Islam the Alawis took over the belief in a system of successive divine emanations and the cult of Ali (the Prophet’s cousin and son-in-law). Unlike other Shi’ites, the Alawis believe that Ali was the incarnation of God Himself in a divine triad: Ali is the Ma’na (meaning or essence); Muhammad, whom Ali created in his own light, is the Ism (name), and Salman al-Farsi (the Persian; one of the Companions of the Prophet) is al-Bab (gate). This is the most distinguishing feature of the Alawi religion, namely the centrality of Ali, whom the Alawis deify.

Third, in common with Isma’ili Shi’ites, the Alawis subscribe to the idea of an esoteric religious knowledge hidden from the masses and revealed to only a few who are initiated into the secrets in a lengthy and complex initiation. In fact, both the Isma’ili and the Alawis are known in Arabic as al-batiniyah, referring to the undisclosed tenets of their religion.

Finally, much of the rituals that set Alawis off from other Muslims have been taken from Christianity. The use of ceremonial wine and the observance of Christmas are two of the borrowed practices.

As is clear from this succinct account, Alawi beliefs are strongly syncretic and the socio-political contexts of the Alawi founding fathers and subsequent scholars have contributed tremendously to the evolution and transformation of these beliefs. It must also be noted that that much of what has been written about the Alawis in the pre-modern era has been largely polemical partly due to hostility and largely also because of the lack of direct access to the works of what is still ostensibly a very secretive sect. As such, when Sâmi al-Jundi, the Syrian Isma’ili Minister of Information during General Salah Jadid’s rule (1966–1970) suggested that the “secret books” of the Alawis be made public in an attempt to quell growing sectarian hostility towards them, Jadid—who was an Alawi—refused, fearing the backlash of his co-religionist shaykhs (scholars). It is only from the nineteenth century onwards that works written by Alawis themselves began to appear and these have either confirmed some of the beliefs outlined above, or have put forward the view that the Alawis are no different from the Twelver Shi’ites, dismissing the polemical views as prejudicial.

In addition to their doctrinal beliefs, it is also extremely important to track the geographical spread and distribution of the Alawi sect as it grew over time. The founder of
the sect, Muhammad ibn Nusayr al-Bakri an-Namiri (d. 883 or 873), was from Iraq. He declared himself the bāb (door) to the 11th Shi’ite Imam, al-Hasan al-‘Askari. Even though Ibn Nusayr’s ideas were not captured in writing and he was regarded as an extremist and a heretic by his Shi’ite contemporaries, he was still able to gather a group of followers around him, who kept on appointing successive bābs. Ibn Nusayr was succeeded by Abū Muḥammad ibn Jundub, about whom very little is known, other than that he was followed by Abū Muhammad al-Janān al-Junbulānī (d. 900), a Persian Sufi from Junbulān in Iraq. The latter travelled to Egypt, where he met as-Sayyid al-Husayn ibn Ḥamdān al-Khaṣṣibi (d. 947). Al-Khaṣṣibi adopted al-Junbulānī’s Sufi teachings and began travelling, resettling in Baghdad and later in Aleppo, where he established a Sufi order. The teachings of al-Khaṣṣibi greatly influenced a young adherent from Tiberias in Palestine, Abū Sa’d al-Maymūn at-Ṭabarānī (d. 1031), who was born 10 years after the death of his spiritual master. At the age of 18, at-Ṭabarānī moved to Aleppo, where he adopted al-Khaṣṣibi’s teachings and then went on to Latakia to preach and consolidate the Nusayri faith and his writings soon became the basis of the Alawi doctrine. At that time, Latakia—or Laodicea as it was known—was still under Byzantine control and unhindered by any Muslim authority, at-Ṭabarānī was able to convert the peasants (possibly still pagan) of the mountainous hinterland of the town.

The coastal mountains of Latakia and its surroundings would from here on become the geographic sanctum of the Alawi community. Due to their large concentration in this region and common sectarian identity, later historians would refer to the Alawis as a compact minority. This specificity contributed tremendously to shaping their destiny; the engagement and interaction of the Alawi community with the outside world found expression from this point onward in what can best be described as a historical pattern, constantly repeating itself. Exchanges with outsiders were characterized either by clashes and confrontation, mutually beneficial cooperation or attempts to assimilate the Alawis into the broader fabric of society.

At the turn of the twelfth century, the Western part of Alawi territory was conquered by the Crusaders and after a long siege, the Norman Tancred captured the city of Latakia. The northern areas of what is today known as the Coastal Mountains (Alawi Mountains) formed part of the Norman principality of Antioch, but Christian penetration of the mountain region was negligible. Nonetheless, the Alawis Sunni neighbours would later on accuse them of collaborating with the Crusaders. Later in the century, Shi’ite Isma’ili settlers in the region and took possession of several fortresses in the southern Jablah region, which provoked tensions and clashes with the Alawis. In 1188, Jablah and the surrounding areas were conquered by Ṣuṭūr ad-Dīn and came under the control of the Ayūbid Sultanate. In the Mamluk period, Sultan Baybars took control of several of the Isma’ili fortresses in the region and made numerous attempts to convert and assimilate the Alawis into the Sunni mainstream; he forbade initiations into the sect and built mosques throughout the region. Such attempts were not successful and did not prevent Alawi resistance and rebellion.

The centrality of religious identity and the sharpness of sectarian polarization in the fourteenth-century Mamluk-Era is poignantly reflected in the famous fatwa issued by the Sunni Salafi-reformist scholar Ibn Taymīyyah in 1317, in which he judges the Nusayris to be “more unbelieving than the Jews and the Christians”. Ibn Taymīyyah’s relatively lengthy response to an unusually long question does not provide any insight into the historical context that prompted the inquiry. Rather he focuses on the various aspects of interaction with the Alawis from the perspective of permissibility and prohibition, providing a valuable insight into how this marginalized community was perceived by the
Sunni mainstream. Ibn Taymīyyah goes on to elaborate that it is not permissible to intermarry with them, to eat their food, use their utensils and clothing unless washed or to bury them in Muslim burial grounds. On the other hand, it is permissible to contract them to undertake specified work and to pay them according to the agreed upon terms. If they should repent and profess the faith, they should still not be allowed to bear arms and should be sent where they are isolated from other Nusayris, so that if their professed faith is insincere, they will at least not be able to harm other Muslims. He concludes that going out in Jihad against the Nusayris and commanding the good and forbidding that which is evil is indeed the best of deeds. 24

Insight into the historical context that informs Ibn Taymīyyah’s fatwa is provided by one of his most accomplished students, the historian Ibn Kathīr. 25 According to Ibn Kathīr, a Nusayri rebellion in 1317 was incited by a certain Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan, who claimed to be the Mahdī (Messiah) and the incarnate of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. 26 He proclaimed that the Muslims were disbelievers and that the Nusayris were on the path of truth and managed to gather a huge following, with whom he attacked the city of Jablah, killing many of its inhabitants, destroying mosques and turning them into wineeries. Prisoners were commanded to bow before him and declare him their God and Saviour if they wanted to be emancipated. The Mamluk authorities finally sent troops to quell the uprising and many Nusayris were in turn also slaughtered. 27

This account is also mentioned in the travelogue 28 of the famous Arab itinerant Ibn Baṭṭūṭah, but his rendition is far more nuanced and demonstrates that the politics of this era were by no means bereft of pragmatism. Hanna Batatu provides an insightful summary and interpretation of this event:

The ‘Alawīs were the food-producers of many of these parts for centuries. As long ago as 1317, in the days of the Mamluks (as can be read in the pages of Ibn Baṭṭūṭah), the Sultan of Cairo, having learnt of a violent uprising by the ‘Alawīs in the district of Jablah, ordered that they be put to the sword. “But these people,” urged the Chief of the Amirs of Tripoli in protest, “work the land for the Muslims and if they are killed, the Muslims will be enfeebled.” The rebels were thus spared on account of their vital economic function. 29

The lot of the ‘Alawīs was thus never enviable. 30 They were at best tolerated and at the worst of times faced terrible persecution. This pattern continued prior to and after the Ottoman conquest of the region in 1516 and the fate of the Alawis continued to swing between persecution and neglect.

The Ottomans were already at war with the Shi’ite Safavid Empire that ruled over Persia (1502–1736) and fearing possible collaboration between the Safavids and the Shi’ites of Greater Syria prior to its conquest, Sultan Selim I ordered a census of the various Shi’ite sects living adjacent to the border with Persia and massacred them. 31 Alawi historical accounts suggest that Selim I’s conquest of Syria included expeditions against the Nusayris as well and thousands were killed in the process; these expeditions were legitimised by fatwas obtained by the Sultan from a Damascene scholar, Shaykh Nuh al-Hanafi al-Dimashqī. 32 In the 1820s, the Ottoman authorities once again took recourse to a fatwa by a certain Shaykh Muhammad Ibrahim Nasir al-Din al-Mugrabi to quell the continuous state of Alawi insurgency in the surroundings of Latakia. 33 The onset of the nineteenth century marked the beginning of the rapid decline of the Ottoman Empire, but the conditions of the Alawi community in Syria remained dismal and not only were they marginalized and oppressed from the outside, they also remained extremely divided within. However, as the world around them began rapidly changing, so did their fate.
In October 1831, the Egyptian Army began its campaign to conquer Greater Syria. The well-trained Egyptian Army under the command of Ibrahim Pasha easily overran the Ottoman army and after signing a peace treaty in May 1833, Muhammad Ali—Egypt’s powerful ruler—considered Greater Syria, Crete and Adana as much a part of his domain as Egypt. However, the Ottomans remained committed to winning these territories back. The Egyptians nonetheless began conscripting the Syrians into their army and the first Nusayri (Alawi) uprising in September 1834 erupted in response to this unwelcome intrusion. The fighting lasted for eight months and significantly, the Alawi rebels were supported by the Ottomans. Nonetheless, when the Ottomans regained control of Syria in 1841, they picked up where the Egyptians left off and began conscripting Syrians into their army, including Alawis. Even though conscription was once again strongly resisted and remained a cause for rebellion, it was the first step towards the social transformation and integration of the Alawis into the institutional apparatuses of the State and, as such, into the broader social fabric of Syrian society as well.

As the Ottoman Empire became further embroiled in external conflicts in the late nineteenth century, it was once again forced to accommodate the aspirations of the marginalized Alawis. A case in point is that of the mercurial rise and fall of the charismatic Alawi tribal leader Isma’il Khayr Bey, who was reputedly a vicious brigand, but was nevertheless employed in the service of the Ottomans and finally aspired to govern the province of Homs on their behalf. Isma’il took advantage of the Ottoman Empires preoccupation with the Crimean war in 1853 and took over the large district of Safita, which was mostly inhabited by Nusayris. Instead of fighting him, the Ottomans decided to grant him a formal position as the governor of the Mountain as they were deeply engaged in the war against Russia and most of the Ottoman troops that were stationed in Syria had been dispatched to the battlefield. Isma’il proved to be a capable governor and an effective tax collector and his success contributed to his growing ambition. He was the first Nusayri leader to rule over a large area that included Nusayris, Christians and Sunni Muslims. While he won the admiration of most of the Nusayris, local Sunnis were offended by the fact that they were under the authority of a heretic. After the end of the Crimean war (1856), regular Ottoman troops began returning to Syria and even though they renewed his governorship, the Ottomans became increasingly weary of Isma’il’s influence. He was finally crushed in 1858, not so much by the Ottomans but by the lack of solidarity and unity amongst the Nusayris; Isma’il’s own uncle betrayed, killed and decapitated him and handed his head over to the Ottomans.

Internal Rebellions and Foreign Encroachment

In addition to quelling the fires of internal rebellions, the Ottomans were further burdened with the now near impossible task of curbing foreign encroachment. Western countries including France and England had been granted capitulations by the Ottoman sultans as early as the sixteenth century to facilitate trade; foreigners were thus also allowed to stay and travel through the Empire for pilgrimage and for conducting business. By the nineteenth century, Western powers were using their presence to further their political interests in the crumbling Empire and sought to do so by strengthening ties with local religious minorities. As such, religion became the sharp edge that was ultimately used to carve up the spoils of the weakened Ottoman Empire. The British exercised influence by championing the cause of the Druze, the French supported the Christian Maronites and the Russians backed the Greek Orthodox; no one initially...
paid any attention to the Alawis, but they finally drew the attention of American Protestant Missionaries, who made them the object of their evangelical zeal. American missionary activity brought with it opportunities for self-improvement and social mobility for the Alawi community and they benefitted primarily from the schools that were established and that provided them with structured education for the first time.

The Ottomans became anxious about the increasing missionary activity and consequently attempted to redress the situation by attempting to win the Alawis over to Sunni Islam. Ironically, it was missionary activity that provided the impetus for the Ottoman State to intervene to try and improve the lot of the Alawis. Even though the Missionaries failed in their primary goal of converting the Alawis to Christianity, they stirred awake in the community the desire for social integration. The Alawis began sensing the importance of belonging to the mainstream and grasped how this could be advantageous in the rapidly changing environment. Such political awareness drove home the realization that they were part of the Muslim world and becoming Christian was not as important as being Muslim, since the missionaries would one day depart leaving them to face their destiny alone. By the 1920s, the Alawis thus began asserting their Muslim identity and declared themselves adherents of Shi’ite Islam. Nonetheless, with the onset of the twentieth century the Ottoman Empire was now a mere shadow of its former self—and drawing its last breaths—it finally disintegrated and was quickly absorbed by the victorious Allied Powers after the First World War.

The Alawi Ascent

From Empires and Faith Communities to Citizenship and Statehood

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire had a tremendous impact on the Muslim world. For the Arab peoples who lived within its domain, its dismemberment marked the end of a political, social and religious order that had shaped their patterns of public behaviour for 400 years. The end of Empire and the onset of Western domination also marked the emergence of a modern Arab intelligentsia not exclusively influenced by the Islamic tradition, but by Western modernity as well. Reform-minded intellectuals rose to the double challenge of reconciling their inherited traditions with the challenges of the modern world: they had to engage in an internal dialogue with their own rich past so as to draw upon the essential elements that had defined them, while simultaneously engaging in an external cross-cultural dialogue so as to understand and confront the challenges of a new and different reality inspired exclusively by the West.

Islamism and Arabism emerged as the dominant intellectual trends in the region, the latter influenced by Western nationalist discourse and the former seeking to find the seeds of a political community within the framework of the broader congregation of the Muslim faithful. However, the hopes and ambitions that these nascent ideologies inspired were quickly tempered by the harsh reality of Western domination; Syria’s fate was placed in the hands of France as a result of a secret accord—the Sykes-Picot Agreement—signed between the British and the French during the war. The sharing of the spoils between the two countries was formalized by the League of Nations’ mandate system and France became Syria’s Colonial Master in September 1923.

It was thus only natural that the Syrian state established by the French in the Mandate period would be derisively looked upon as an artificial entity that upset the natural harmony of Biłād ash-Shām, a geographical designation that in Arab history referred to the territory that covers what is today Syria, Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon. More
importantly, the Syrian state was not founded in response to the aspirations of its inhabi-
tants but rather in defiant opposition to the vast majority, who demanded the establish-
ment of an Arab state that would stretch across all the lands of geographical Syria at the
very least, and if possible include Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula as well.  As Eyal Zisser
cogently argues, the French did not regard the establishment of the Syrian state—except
for Lebanon—as a fundamental objective of their colonial presence in the region.
Explaining further, he insightfully maintains:

Indeed, immediately after taking control of the entire Levant in 1920, the
French acted to fragment the area. The internal region of Syria was divided
into two states; Aleppo and Damascus (based on the Ottoman vilayets),
which were only united in 1924. In addition, the French established states for
the ethnic and religious minorities in the Syrian territory: a Druze state in the
area of Jabal Druze, with its capital Suwayda, and an ‘Alawi state along the
‘Alawi coast, with its capital Ladhiqyya. Autonomous districts were also estab-
lished in the Jazira (then populated mostly by Kurds and Turkmen) and in Alex-
andretta, which also had a large Turkish population. The establishment of the
state of Lebanon should also be seen as, inter alia, part of the effort to fragment
Syria. The French intention was to ensure their future control over this terri-
tory, once it had fallen into their hands. Even when they set up the Syrian
state at the end of the 1920s, they hampered the establishment and operation
of its governmental institutions. Rather they continued to strengthen and
entrench the forces of disunity and divisiveness in Syrian society, including sec-
tarian and regional rivalries and the gulf between the urban and rural popu-
lations. The legacy of French Mandatory rule would later prove a handicap
for the post-independence Syrian regime.

The French occupation sparked the Great Syrian Revolt of 1925, which was the first mass
movement against colonial rule in the Middle East and which provided a model for
popular nationalism and resistance that remains potent to this day. French rule was
in many ways a continuation of Ottoman policies, with a similar reliance on local elites
—who were predominantly of a Sunni background—serving as mediators between the
central state and the local society. This dynamic was famously described by Albert
Hourani as the “politics of notables”. Elaborating further, Philip Khoury demonstrated
that under both Ottoman and French rules, these notables played the role of minimizing
the political aspirations of the masses in return for variable and qualified access to political
power and economic gain. Such brinkmanship was ultimately unsustainable and as
Michael Provence has argued, the 1925 Revolt was a signal event, ushering in the emer-
gence of mass politics in the Arab world and the decisive breakdown of the elite-domi-
nated system of the “politics of notables”.

Nonetheless, the Alawi community still remained internally divided at the onset of the
French occupation. The four loose Alawi tribal associations of the Khayyatun, Haddadun,
Matawirah and Kalbiyyah were not organized in a unified, hierarchical structure with
internal cohesion or a central leadership authority. In addition, religious sub-divisions
(Shamsis, Qamaris and Murshidiyyun) further eroded their sense of oneness. 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.
In spite of their manipulative attempts to steer the course of Syria in a direction that accorded with their own vested interests, the French ultimately failed to correctly read the implications of the social and political changes taking place during the mandate period. It was no longer possible to manipulate the Alawi traditional leaders in a manner that served French agendas. For example, Jaber al-Abbas—France’s most important protégé and the chief of the Khayyatin tribal confederation—became a devoted supporter of the nationalist cause after having been abandoned by his French masters. By contrast, the proclaimed nationalist and accomplished poet, Muhammad Suleiman al-Ahmed (Badawi al-Jabal)—who had served as King Faisal’s personal secretary before the mandate—turned out to be an ardent separatist who invoked French protection against Sunni domination.

A new pattern of organization was being manifest in Alawi society and political ties and associations were being established along new lines—traversing sectarian and religious barriers—and the Alawi community began reflecting the characteristics of a mixed, more modern society.

In 1936, the Franco-Syrian Treaty of Independence was signed, paving the way for the reincorporation of the sectarian Druze and Alawi statelets—carved out by the French—into the Syrian republic over the next two years. An Alawi gathering in Tartus on 25 February 1936 set in motion the process for winning the community’s support for the nationalist cause and a broad spectrum of Alawis voiced their support for the union. While the Tartus gathering set the tone for the political integration of the Alawis into Syrian society, the meetings of their religious leaders that followed thereafter marked the beginnings of their social integration as well. The impetus for these meetings was the French High Commissioner’s declaration that the Alawis were an independent community distinct from the Sunnis, Shi’ites, Ismailis and Druze. This was perceived as serving the purpose of the separatists and therefore several gatherings by Alawi religious leaders convened to affirm their affiliation to the Muslim community. As a result of these gatherings and pronouncements by the Alawi religious leaders, the Mufti of Palestine, al-Ḥājj Amīn al-Husaynī, a Sunni scholar who was also an ardent supporter of unification, issued a fatwa confirming that the Alawis were indeed Muslims and that they should be wholeheartedly accepted as such by every Muslim.

Both at a political and religious level, these events marked the beginnings of the social integration of the Alawi community into the fabric of a nascent society working its way towards independence and statehood.

In the religious sphere, the efforts of the Alawi scholar ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Khayr are of singular importance in redefining the Alawi community’s religious identity, moving it away from its heterodox past and into the more acceptable fold of Shi’ite Islam. Writing in 1937 and inspired by the re-awakening of the Alawi community, al-Khayr states:

The Nusayrīs, as they were once called, and the ‘Alawīs as they are called now in the period of the [French] occupation, are one of the Muslim sects ... They are Imamate Muslims and pure Arabs. For many reasons—mainly the pressure of some tyrannical rulers in the Islamic period—they took refuge in the mountains of this country. They used to practice their Islamic tenets with secrecy and in the meanwhile externally followed some of the religious rituals of the dominant forces in order to protect their communal identity ... This externalization introduced non-Muslim and alien rituals which became part of the customs adopted by their populace but rejected by their khaṣṣā [religious elite]. This is the reason for the suspicion ... and speculation about their faith ... We do not know exactly when these alien habits were [introduced] ... but we think that some of them were [introduced] during the Crusades.

Sectarianism in Alawi Syria
Whether cognisant of the importance of mainstream acceptance or inspired by the desire to strip Alawi beliefs and practices of foreign accretions, al-Khayr’s writings set the tone for Alawi scholars that came after him. Until his death in 1986, he continued to elaborate religious arguments that portrayed the Alawis as a genuine Muslim sect with a pure Arab pedigree. Al-Khayr’s efforts were reciprocated by the Shi’ite religious establishment and some of the works on Alawi religious matters written by scholars influenced by his ideas were prefaced by Shi’ite luminaries such as Sayid Muhsin at-Tabaṭabā’ī al-Ḥakīm, Imam Mūsa aṣ-Ṣadr and Muhammad Shams ad-Dīn.

Nonetheless, the burden of centuries of marginalization was not going to be simply erased by the mere prospect of integration and social acceptance. Separatist inclinations within the Alawi community were still prevalent, and were kept alive by the French as well, as can be seen in the tumultuous career of the early twentieth-century Alawi leader, Sulayman al-Murshid. Al-Murshid—the founder of the Murshidiyyun sect—came into prominence as a Shepard boy who claimed divine powers and launched a religious and political career spanning over more than 20 years. In 1939, he instigated a rebellion along with 5000 of his followers and armed with French weapons, they resisted the authority of the Sunni-dominated nationalist government. Al-Murshid remained opposed to integration and instigated a second uprising after Syrian independence in 1946. This rebellion was also crushed by the national government and al-Murshid was summarily executed.

The newly born Republic was therefore justifiably described as being “in many respects a state without being a nation-state, a political entity without being a political community”. The process of integration and the attempt to create a political community would involve socio-economic improvements, the modernization of marginalized communities and society at large and the use of strong measures including the use of force. Political infighting amongst the Sunni elite and the military’s constant intervention in the political process made the post-independence years extremely turbulent. Syria’s first democratically elected president, Shukri al-Quwwatli, spent just about three years in office before being ousted by the military in 1949, ushering in a series of coups before a civilian parliamentary government once again resumed control in 1954. The major shortcoming of Syrian politics in this period was its failure to include a wider stratum within its system of electoral contestation and politics was still the preserve of the privileged few, aptly described by Raymond Hinnebusch as a “liberal oligarchy”.

In spite of all its problems, the post-independence era—more specifically the period between 1946 and 1958—was one of vitality and pluralism in which new middle class parties entered the political fray. The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and the Ba’th Party were born in this period and both would leave indelible marks upon the country’s destiny. The Muslim Brotherhood under the leadership of Muṣṭafā as-Sibā’ī was a strong proponent of parliamentary legitimacy and social justice. As-Sibā’ī was also a political pluralist who recognized the country’s diversity and he therefore opposed an article in the 1950 constitution that stated that Islam was the religion of the state, arguing instead for it to read that Islam was the religion of the Head of State and that Islamic Law was a fundamental source of legislation. While his religiously conservative peers expressed scepticism of the secular Ba’th Party, as-Sibā’ī was happy to enter into an alliance with the Socialist Ba’thist Akram al-Hawrānī to defend the role of the state in wealth distribution and agricultural land reform. This was of course before the Ba’th Party’s seizure of power in 1963 and when it was still a real political movement with roots in society.
The Role of the Ba’th Party

The nascent Ba’th Party was instrumental in the Alawi rise to power. Many of the Syrian religious minorities found the Party appealing because it advocated a secular, socialist political system that held the promise to free them from socio-economic discrimination and minority status. Ba’thist ideology did not discriminate on the basis of religion and granted Alawis and other minorities’ unfettered party membership. The Party’s disproportionate expansion in the Latakia region therefore gave the Alawis a strong base from which to gain power in the region in the 1950s and in the nation later.

Far more important than the Ba’th Party, the Army was the other national organization that contributed directly to the Alawi ascent. Like the party, the Army was also attractive as a means of upward social mobility for marginalized religious minorities and impoverished Syrians from the rural peripheries, who flocked to it in numbers far greater than their percentage of the population. Several factors contributed to the over-representation of Alawis in the Army. First, the French had encouraged minority recruitment to counter the nationalist tendencies of the Arab-Sunni majority; second, minorities came from poor backgrounds and were attracted by the economic opportunities and social advancement offered by a career in the army; and third, Sunni urban elites avoided military service and considered the army a place for the socially undistinguished.

The political crisis that began with independence reached a peak in 1958 and the Syrians sought redress by merging with Egypt to form the United Arab Republic (UAR). This experiment was a failure and Syria withdrew in 1961, paving the way for the Ba’th revolution of 1963, which toppled the country’s traditional pyramid of authority and the previously dominant Sunni urban elite was brushed aside by a broad coalition of new political and social forces. The hidden hand behind the Ba’thist revolution was a small collective of Army officers who referred to themselves as the Military Committee (al-Lajnah al-‘Askariyyah), most of whom were from religious minority backgrounds. One of its founding members was destined to shape the future of the country and would dominate its politics for more than 30 years, emerging as the architect of Modern Syria; this was none other than Hafiz al-Asad, a young Alawi officer from the little village of Qardahah in the sect’s mountainous heartland.

The Alawi Compromise

From Stillborn Democracy to Dictatorship and Minority Rule

The Ba’th seizure of power in 1963 that brought an end to the post-colonial Syrian state’s very brief, intermittent and messy experiment with parliamentary politics was not a product of mass mobilization from below, but rather a coup that was engineered by a handful of military officers, which in turn also faced fierce opposition across the whole spectrum of the politically active population, from Nasserites to Islamists and liberals. Faksh compellingly argues that as intra-Ba’th rivalry and intra-army factionalism intensified, Alawi primordial loyalties became an important factor in political alignments. 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. While the regime established by Salah Jadid in 1966 was also dominated by Alawis, he attempted to move somewhat beyond Alawi or military support to entrench his rule and inadvertently weakened his support in both these spheres, making it relatively easy for the strong Alawi-military faction of Hafiz al-Asad to depose him in 1970.
Coming into power in November 1970, Hafiz al-Asad single-mindedly constructed centres of power around Alawi sectarian groupings, especially in the army, relying heavily on his officer faction, whose core members were from his immediate family and close relatives, extending to include members of his tribe and then others from the Alawi community at large. Non-Alawis were not entirely excluded and Sunni officials were also placed in high positions, such as Defence Minister Mustafa Tlas. However, such individuals exercised authority in accordance with the President’s policies and had no independent political constituencies backing them. Asad’s Alawi factions in the centres of power reigned supreme and considerably diminished the chances of non-Alawis to form independent blocs that would be capable of posing a significant threat to his regime. Van Dam contends that the appointment of Sunni officers such as Tlas to such high posts may very well have been done to placate Sunnis and dispel the impression that senior positions were the exclusive preserve of the Alawis.

In addition to sectarian solidarity, repression also played a central role in Asad’s consolidation of power. The President created a “mukhabarat state” in which multiple intelligence and security agencies watched the people, the army and each other. Asad also created two armies, the first made up of Praetorian Guard units recruited from his family and sect and charged with defending the regime, while the second was a professional army responsible for defending the country’s borders. The model of Syria under Asad is succinctly described by Zisser as

... that of a centralized regime of vast might—with, at its apex, a group of military officers of clear ethnic identity, and at its foundation “a broad coalition” of political and social forces representing broad sectors of the Syrian people who back the regime.

“Populist Authoritarianism”

Some scholars have noted the utility of the concept of “Populist Authoritarianism” as a useful characterization for understanding the regime that took shape under Asad, while others explained the stabilization of the state by viewing it through the lens of neo-patrimonialism, emphasizing how the regime consolidated power through the construction of clientele networks around the presidency. None, however, disputed the centrality and absolute authority of the President. This is poignantly captured by one of his biographers, who notes that by the 1980s—when Asad had firmly entrenched his authority—his “preferred instrument of government was the telephone”. He scarcely attended meetings or saw ministers, but all were acutely aware of his presence and reach, affirmed every now and then by a “disembodied voice on the telephone.”

With Asad at the helm, Syria underwent a remarkable transformation after 1970. Over the course of the next three decades, the country was refashioned from a weak and unstable state into a regional player with standing and influence, making Asad one of the most prominent leaders in the Middle East. Asad’s ability to entrench and perpetuate minority Alawi rule over a sometimes very hostile Sunni majority for such an extended period was no less impressive. Such a feat not only required an oppressive and authoritarian government structure, but also the ability of the regime to legitimate itself, primarily by decreasing the saliency of its distinct identity and building a unifying façade. Asad’s unifying ideology at the onset of his rule was secular pan-Arabism, tempered by a unique leadership ability that combined ruthlessness with compromise.
and co-optation in dealing with enemies. He also displayed a level of pragmatism that distinguished him from some of his more ideologically rigid Ba’thist colleagues whose short sightedness were a source of major tensions in society. A case in point is that of a junior Ba’thist army officer of Alawi origins, Ibrahim al-Khallas, who caused a major eruption in Damascus in April 1967 after publishing an article in a Syrian army weekly magazine, arguing that the best way to promote Arab socialism was to confine belief in God, religion, capitalism, imperialism and all other values that had controlled society in the past to the museum of history.

This incident occurred during the rule of Hafiz al-Asad’s predecessor, General Salah Jadid. Under his rule, the state campaigned against religion and belittled the traditions of Islam. A protest gathering was held in the Umayyad mosque against such policies, but Jadid clamped mercilessly down upon the protestors. It was therefore not surprising to find that when Jadid and his supporters were challenged by Asad’s military faction for the leadership of the country in the closing months of 1970, leading figures in the Muslim Brotherhood did not conceal their support for Asad. Asad’s rise to power ushered in a new era and he softened the anti-Islamic tone of his predecessors. He also prayed in Sunni Mosques, went on pilgrimage to Mecca and had the Alawi religion declared a legitimate branch of Shi’ite Islam. In 1973, vociferous debate broke out in the country after the draft Syrian constitution excluded a clause that stipulated that Islam was the religion of the state. Asad intervened to calm tensions and added an amendment that stipulated that the religion of the President of the Republic had to be Islam, affirming a position adopted in the 1950s by the founder of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, Mustafa as-Sibaa. Asad’s Islamic credentials were then re-verified by a fatwa issued by one of his strategic allies, the influential Lebanese-based Iranian cleric, Imam Musa al-Sadr, who declared the Alawis to be Shi’ite Muslims.

For the left-leaning, secular Asad, religion was no more than a convenient tool for influencing politics and he always strove to utilize it to his advantage, sometimes with a brutal effect. In the mid-1970s, an extremist breakaway faction of the Muslim Brotherhood led by Marwan Hadid formed the Fighting Vanguard, which began a violent armed insurrection against the regime culminating in the bloody massacre of Alawi cadets at an artillery school in Aleppo in 1979. Even though the Muslim Brotherhood distanced themselves from the attack, Asad’s Interior Minister General Adnan Dabbagh held them directly responsible. The Asad regime thus used the incident to gradually decimate the country’s strongest and most well-organized political opposition group, culminating in the Hama massacre in 1982, which resulted in the complete removal of the Muslim Brotherhood from the Syrian political equation from that point onward.

Asad showed similar resolve in using force against the nascent Lebanese Shi’ite Islamist group Hizbullah; he was uncomfortable with the group’s religious orientation and close relationship with the Islamic Republic of Iran. When Hizbullah’s growing influence began threatening the secular Shi’ite Amal group that was supported by Damascus during the Lebanese civil war, the Syrians and Amal violently clamped down on the Islamist movement, killing its fighters and assassinating its leaders, with the current Secretary-General, Hasan Nasrallah, also narrowly escaping death at that time. However, when the Soviet Union was on the verge of collapse in the early 1990s, Asad travelled to Iran to strengthen his alliance with Tehran, realizing that with the decline of Soviet Power, he would have to now rely on himself and regional allies. This visit also paved the way for reconciliation with Hizbullah and the development of a longstanding alliance that persevered with dramatic effect under his son, Bashar al-Asad.
In the decade before his death, Asad also reconciled with political Islam and practically abandoned pan-Arabism as the mainstay of Syria’s foreign policy, this being in line with the rise of the Islamic factor in inter-Arab relations. Apart from the regime’s strategic alliance with the Islamic Republic of Iran and its Lebanese proxy Hizbullah, Palestinian Sunni Islamist groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad also found a safe haven in Syria. Hafiz al-Asad was, therefore, able to maintain his regime’s broad-based appeal by foregrounding its commitment to Arab concerns—whether secular or Islamist—while keeping the issue of minority rule subtly beyond the broader gaze of outside observers. There is no denying that under Hafiz al-Asad, the lot of the Alawi community improved tremendously; they held strong positions in the army, the security services, the professions, the party and indeed in every institution across the land. Their advancement still, however, offended many Syrians, who believed they were unduly favoured, but significantly, now only a very narrow sector within Syrian society held their heterodox beliefs against them. The bitter compromise that was struck by the Alawi community with the Asad regime was the acceptance of dictatorship in return for social mobility. While they had indeed made great advances in the modern era, the Alawis were unfortunately still no less despised, but now for altogether different reasons not of their own making, but rather due to the actions of a regime that spoke in their name.

The Alawi Dilemma

The Search for a Common Syrian Identity

When Hafiz al-Asad died on 10 June 2000, he bequeathed the country to his eldest living son Bashar, and with it, the deeply rooted repressive state apparatus that he had so carefully built. In spite of early speculation on the possibility of a power struggle in Syria, the transition from father to son was remarkably smooth and the party and army elite closed ranks, ratifying the process initiated by Hafiz al-Asad to establish his son as his successor. Bashar al-Asad fashioned his image as a modernizer who saw reform as a gradual process and strove to win the appeal of the younger generation of Syrians without raising the concerns of the older generation, and thereby came to represent both continuity and change.

Whereas the three decades of Ba’thist rule under Asad Senior could in some respects be seen as a necessary stage that left Syria with a stronger state that had broken down class and communal cleavages while producing a more diversified economy, the transition to Asad Junior was by no means the dawn of democracy. As Hinnebusch explains, the political and economic liberalization instituted by Bashar amounted to a mere decompression of authoritarian controls and greater access for the bourgeoisie to decision-makers; the regime’s legitimation of pluralism was really envisioned as a substitute for democratization and not as its precursor. As such, the 2001 Damascus Spring—the brief mobilization calling for the institution of democracy—was quickly nipped in the bud, even if the role of the security forces under Bashar al-Asad were at this stage much less obtrusive than before.

In essence, Bashar’s rule was very much the perpetuation of the system of governance that was established by his father, embellished with a modernizing tweak. The “populist authoritarianism” of the father, alluded to above, became the “modernizing authoritarianism” of the son, which according to Volker Perthes, was an attempt to make the system work better so that it could survive and deliver development. Ultimately, Syria’s fate—under both father and son—was inextricably tied to regional and
international struggles in good part outside of its control. Nonetheless, the Asad regime’s strong commitment to an Arab nationalist identity, its hard line on Israel and its opposition to American Imperialism all contributed to maintaining its internal cohesion. These positions resonated with the Syrian street and the Arab masses in general, providing the regime with far more insulation against internal opposition than was the case with other Arab countries.

In spite of this—and contrary to what Bashar al-Asad believed at the onset of the Arab Spring in December 2010/January 2011—Syria’s foreign policy posture and cosmetic reforms were not enough to save it from the protest movement that spread across the region like wildfire, as a new generation of Arab youth took to the streets demanding political agency and the right to determine their own destinies. Starting in the southern Deraa province, the protest movement spread across Syria and as the regime’s reform façade collapsed, it quickly revealed its fangs, a posture that the Syrian people were all too familiar with but no longer intimidated by. Unable to quell the uprising with force and unwilling to reform, Bashar al-Asad was powerless to stop the country from spiralling into a brutal civil war. Once the floodgates were opened, Syria became a battleground for regional players seeking to assert their influence and in a twist of historical irony, it was the Shi’ite Islamic Republic of Iran and its Lebanese Islamist proxy Hizbullah that came to the rescue of the secular Ba’thist regime, joining in the fray to keep Asad in power.

In the midst of the struggle over Syria’s future, the Alawi community now faces the painful dilemma of seeing its fate being linked to that of the regime’s, which still strives to exploit sectarian solidarity to maintain its support base. However, the fissures in society are far too deep and the extent of the uprising has been far too pervasive. Bashar al-Asad’s future and that of his regime’s now lie in the hands of regional and international powerbrokers and their immediate fate remains uncertain. Nonetheless, what has clearly been established by the Syrian uprising is that the political acquiescence of the people is a thing of the past. As such, many Alawis have also begun voicing their opposition to the regime, calling for the establishment of a democratic dispensation and the building of a nation that encompasses all Syrians. Such an outcome at this specific juncture is at best still over-optimistic as the vested interests of outside parties in the current global environment still outweigh the aspirations of the Syrian people fighting for freedom and liberation.

What is however certain is that the fate of the Alawi community is not inextricably linked to that of the Asad regime. The transition from the oppressive minority white rule in South Africa to a democratic dispensation that embraced all of that country’s people stands out as a beacon of hope for Syria as well. The Alawi community is now more than ever before a part of the Syrian social fabric and so while Bashar al-Asad and his regime may have no role to play in the re-building of a better Syria, the Alawi community most certainly will.

Conclusion

The twentieth century marked a decisive turning point in the history of the Alawi compact minority in Syria. After centuries of isolation and persecution, the people of the mountain began the descent from their sanctum into a world that had changed fundamentally, and with it, their fate. In spite of dissonant echoes from the past that ring out ever so often in the present, the Syria dominated by the Asad clan is fundamentally different from the fourteenth-century Mamluk-Era of Ibn Taymiyyah and today’s politics asserts a far
greater influence over religion, unlike in the past. In contemporary times, religious affiliation is no longer the sole determinant of identity and faith communities have been displaced by nation-states in which citizenship is the primary identity marker, subsuming orthodox, heterodox and secular affiliations. As one astute thinker explains, within the modern social imaginary belief and unbelief can coexist as alternatives. Therefore, while religion may still occupy an important space in contemporary Islamic societies, changing political and historical circumstances have made these societies more tolerant than ever before. Equal citizenship, the freedom of belief, association and expression have all taken precedence over traditional religious affiliation and therefore political identity has become a far more important site of struggle than religious identity.

In religious terms, the Alawi community has made major strides by re-integrating into the broader socio-religious fabric of Syrian society through asserting its mainstream Shi’ite affiliation. Those within the community that are disinclined towards any religious affiliation have found a place in the secular spaces of society. Politically, however, the Alawi community as a whole has been hamstrung by its association with the ruling Asad clan, which has exploited sectarian discourse to exercise political power. However, sectarianism as an explanatory paradigm for making sense of the current impasse in Syria is of limited use as it runs the risk of over shadowing other determinant factors that are equally important. The politics of the country are no less influenced by its colonial legacy, the nature of the modern nation-state, the prevalence of authoritarianism while religion may still occupy an important space in contemporary Islamic societies, changing political and historical circumstances have made these societies more tolerant than ever before. Equal citizenship, the freedom of belief, association and expression have all taken precedence over traditional religious affiliation and therefore political identity has become a far more important site of struggle than religious identity.

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NOTES

3. Ibid.
4. For one of the best accounts of the emergence and crystallisation of the Sunni and Shi’ite doctrinal schools, see: Bashîr Mûsâ Nâfi‘, al-‘Iraq – Siyâsât al-Wahdah wa al-Inqîsân [Iraq – Contexts of Unity and Division], Cairo: Dâr ash-Shuruq, 2006, pp. 15–118.
7. Ibid., pp. 34–47.
9. In early works of heresiography, the sect is sometimes also referred to as an-Namîtrîyyah. See: An-Nawbakhhtî, Firaq ash-Shî‘ah [The Shi’ite Sects], op. cit., pp. 95–104.
12. Two relatively recent studies provide a detailed insight into Alawi beliefs and practices; for a more comprehensive treatment of the topic, see: Meir M. Bar-Asher and Aryeh Kofskey, The Nusayri–Alawi Religion: An Enquiry into its Theology and Liturgy, Leiden: Brill, 2002; Yaron Friedman, The
14. An often-quoted example of such a work is that of an Alawi scholar, who converted to Judaism, then to Islam and then became a Christian Protestant and wrote a book exposing the secrets of the Nusayri (Alawi) creed; see: Sulaymān al-Adhānī, al-Bahkūra as-Sulaymānnīyyah fī kasāf Aṣrār ‘al-Diyānāh an-Nusayriyyah al-‘Alawiyyah [Sulayman’s First Fruits – Revealing the Secrets of the Nusayri – Alawite Religion], Cairo: Dār as-Sahāwah, 1990.
17. Ibid., pp. 2–3.
18. Ibid., p. 3.
22. Ibid., p. 147.
24. Ibid.
26. Friedman also affirms that Ibn Taymiyyah’s fatwa was in response to the 1317 rebellion; see: Yaron Friedman, “Ibn Taymiyya’s Fatwa against the Nusayrī-‘Alawi Sect”, Der Islam, Vol. 82, 2005, p. 359.
30. Ibid., p. 334.
32. Ibid., p. 182.
33. Ibid., p. 183.
35. Ibid., p. 974.
37. Ibid., p. 30.
39. Ibid., p. 897.
40. Ibid., p. 904.
43. Ibid., p 219.
44. Ibid., p. 226.
45. Ibid., p. 232.
51. Ibid., pp. 4–5.
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid., p. 34.
63. Some of the activities and manifestos issued in these gatherings are captured in a work originally published in 1946 by one of the participants; see: Munir ash-Sharif, Al-Muslimūn al-‘Alawīyīn: Man Ḥum wa Aynā Ḥum? [The Alawite Muslims: Who and Where are They?], revised edition, Beirut: Mu’assasah al-Balāgh, 1994.
65. Ibid., p. 37.
68. Ibid., p. 29.
74. W. Cleveland, A History of the Modern Middle East, op. cit., p. 305.
77. The dearth of research on the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood has recently been filled by an important study; see: Raphael Lefèvre, Ashes of Hama: The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, London: Hurst & Co., 2013.
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80. Ibid.
84. Ibid., p. 141.
85. Ibid., p. 143.
89. For a comprehensive work that roots Asad’s life and political activity in the turbulent sea of contemporary Middle Eastern politics, see: Patrick Seale, Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East, revised edition, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
92. Ibid.
93. Ibid.
94. N. Van Dam, The Struggle for Power in Syria, op. cit., p. 69.
95. Ibid.
97. E. Zisser, Asad’s Legacy, op. cit., p. 213.
100. Ibid.
103. Ibid., p. 36.
111. Ibid., p. 174.
112. Ibid.
114. P. Seale, Asad, op. cit., p. 455.

125. For a succinct account of the process that ended minority rule in Apartheid South Africa, see: Allister Sparks, Tomorrow is Another Country: The Inside Story of South Africa’s Negotiated Settlement, Johannesburg & Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1995.
