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The American University in Cairo

Global Affairs and Public Policy

Building Nations, Dividing Peoples:  
Israel, Syria and the  
Struggle for the Druze

A Thesis Submitted to

Middle East Studies

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts

by Daniel W. Stoker

## Abstract

This thesis examines how the development of nationalism and foundation of nation-states in the Levant have contributed to the development of new national identities among the Druze communities in the Golan Heights and Israel and how it has impacted each community. This study builds on the ideas of Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm regarding nationalism and the development of the nation as both invented and imagined. This thesis then analyzes the policies of Israel and Syria regarding the Druze communities in the Golan Heights and the question of Druze feelings toward these policies. It also examines how Druze history has been framed in the context of the nation-state. Additionally this work examines how Israel and Syria's policies toward the Druze have created an economic reliance on the state while shaping national identity in the process. It also explores how Syria has facilitated agricultural development by assisting the Druze in the Golan Heights in the apple trade while weighing Israel's neglect of this community. Finally, I discuss the schism that exists between Israeli-Druze who support Israel and those who support Syria and whether or not national identities can be unimagined.

## Acknowledgements

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## Introduction

The rise of the nation-state and its founding ideology, nationalism, has fundamentally transformed the world we live in. Nationalism is continuously forging new states from the old and in the process creating artificial boundaries uniting the people within them and dividing them from the rest of the world. In every nation there are segments of the population who do not fall neatly into the narrative of the founding ideology. These segments of the population are often subjected to varying degrees of persecution and oppression ranging from forced integration, social and political exclusion to ethnic cleansing and genocide in the most extreme cases.<sup>1</sup> In some cases the founding nationalism is modified or marketed differently to marginalized groups in hopes of influencing these communities to support the state. The case of the Druze in Syria and Israel demonstrates how the rise and modification of nationalisms have impacted traditional communities by creating cleavages that did not exist historically.

The Druze communities that inhabit the mountainous terrain of today's Northern Israel, South-Eastern Syria and Lebanon have traditionally enjoyed communal solidarity. By the 1920's currents of nationalism were spreading in the Middle East and the Druze had become known for their fierce resistance to outside control and the relative autonomy they had carved out of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>2</sup> As the nation-states were being formed in the aftermath of World War I elites sought to integrate the Druze communities into incipient states. The Druze in Lebanon played an important role in the founding of the nation-state that they had helped lay the ground work for in the nineteenth century; however the situation was quite different for the Druze in nascent Israel and Syria.

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<sup>1</sup> Ben Kiernan, "Myth, Nationalism, Genocide," *Journal of Genocide Research*, 2001: 187-206. Emily Greble Balic, "When Croatia Needs Serbs: Nationalism and Genocide in Sarajevo, 1941-1941," *Slavic Review*, 2009: 116-138. Taner Akçam, *From Empire to Republic: The Armenian Genocide and Turkish Nationalism* (London: Zed Books, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Phillip K Hitti, *The Origins of the Druze* (Beirut: Saqi Books, 2008). 9

The controversial nature of Israel's formation and establishment created an immediate enemy in Syria. The leadership of both Israel and Syria viewed the Druze as a potentially strong ally and dangerous fifth column. Elements within Israel and Syria cultivated the Druze loyalty to the state through state institutions such as the military and economic incentives. In Israel these efforts were deemed so successful that the government was certain it could replicate this feat with Syrian Druze living in the Golan Heights after Israel occupied the Syrian territory following the 1967 War. Despite the Israeli authorities' confidence the Golan-Druze proudly clung to their attachments to Syria. The Syrian government continued to exercise its influence in the Golan Heights through a variety of activities aimed at maintaining Druze loyalty.<sup>3</sup>

The political relationship between Israel and Syria has complicated the relations between the Druze living in the Golan-Heights and those living in Israel proper.<sup>4</sup> The rise of nation-state and Israel's and Syria's competition for the loyalty of the Druze have created new identities and with these new identities divisions within the Druze communities. The goal of this research is to explain how nationalism in combination with the rise of the nation-state has impacted this minority community, which has traditionally defined itself politically in opposition to the 'foreign' political authority.<sup>5</sup> In doing so I intend to shed light on how the policies of both Syria and Israel are viewed within the Druze community and how the Druze have adopted emerging national identities.

## **Literature Review**

In spite the Druze's political and strategic regional significance the volume of in depth academic studies on the peculiar sect are limited to a handful. Most of these studies focus on the

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<sup>3</sup> The Economist, "A Would-Be Happy Link with Syria," *The Economist*, February 21, 2009: 48.

<sup>4</sup> Lisa Hajjar, "Making Identity Policy: Israel's Interventions Among the Druze," *Middle East Reports*, 1996: 2-6.

<sup>5</sup> In relation to the Druze I define 'foreign' as coming from outside the greater Druze community. Therefore historically Turks/Ottomans, the French, British, Zionist, Syrian, and Lebanese have all been at times foreign powers seeking to impose their political will on the Druze community.

formation of their faith and their history before the twentieth century. The bulk of scholarly studies on the Druze in the twentieth century focuses on those in Lebanon particularly on their role in the Lebanese civil war. In spite of the enormous amount of print space dedicated to the Israeli-Palestinian issue and the significance of the Druze within it there have been remarkably few in depth scholarly works devoted to the Israeli-Druze. Most books that have been published on the Israeli-Druze community devote most of their chapters to explaining how the Israeli-authorities succeeded at drawing the Israeli-Druze community into an alliance and their military role in the 1948 War.

The first major work *The Druzes in Israel: Political Innovation and Integration in a Middle East Minority* was written by Israeli scholar Gabriel Ben-Dor in 1979.<sup>6</sup> In *The Druzes in Israel*, Ben-Dor looks at Israeli efforts to integrate the Druze into Israeli society. He discusses the contradictions that exist between cultural solidarity and religious plurality as well as those between a religious state and a coexistent democracy. In the end this book questions the viability of a culturally diverse Jewish state and the reality of integrating minorities into a state that classifies itself as Jewish. Political innovation and integration are therefore limited in Israel and while the Druze may be important members of Israeli society they are nonetheless still second class citizens. Ben-Dor praises the Druze for their patriotism and participation in the democratic process while lamenting the ceiling inhibiting Druze efforts to gain equality. In the book Ben-Dor advocates the development of a Druze education system and discusses the problems of educating Druze and Arabs side by side.<sup>7</sup> While he addresses the need to create more economic

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<sup>6</sup> Gabriel Ben-Dor, *The Druzes in Israel: A Political Study* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1979).

<sup>7</sup> At the time of writing this book Professor Ben-Dor was chairing a committee that was tasked with creating a new Israeli-Druze curriculum. He also had previously testified to the Knesset on the issue of marginalizing the Druze and advocated this new curriculum among other reforms directed at the Druze.



opportunities for the Druze he fails to mention how Israel's land policies have unfairly impacted the community.

In response to Ben-Dor's work Kais Firro, an Israeli-Druze scholar, penned *The Druzes in the Jewish State* in 1999.<sup>8</sup> This work is widely considered the most comprehensive and methodologically sound on the Israeli-Druze community. In it Firro seeks to give a sound narrative of the Druze's relationship with Israel but also to clarify the reasons behind the community's continued cooperation with Israeli authorities. The author's thesis asserts that Israeli authorities were able to utilize the peculiar nature of the Druze faith and community to drive a wedge between the Israeli-Druze and the Palestinians while inventing traditions that emphasized commonalities between the Zionists and the Druze. Firro then builds on this idea explaining how the Israeli authorities exploited the internal politics of the Israeli-Druze community to empower those willing to cooperate with them. Finally Firro illustrates how Israeli policies directed toward the Druze community created an economic reliance on the state through land expropriation, lack of village development, and career opportunities in the military, education, and other government services. It is clear from Firro's narrative that he considers the Druze to be Arabs and that he laments the success of Israel's policies. He concludes his book contending that the powerful combination of economic interests, invented tradition, and the co-opted Druze elite ensure that little will change in the Israeli-Druze community both in terms of equality and acceptance of their Arab heritage.

Rehashing much of Firro's work Laila Parsons published *The Druze Between Palestine and Israel, 1947-1949* detailing the origins of Druze service in the IDF and their military role in the 1948 war.<sup>9</sup> Like Firro, Parsons does not give credence to the idea that the Druze share

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<sup>8</sup> Kais Firro, *The Druzes in the Jewish State: A Brief History* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> Laila Parsons, *The Druze Between Palestine and Israel, 1947-1949* (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 2000).

common ancestry with the Jewish people and that this was their motivation for their choice to fight along side them. Unlike Firro, she does not mention how some leaders within the Jewish Agency championed this idea as early as 1939 instead asserting that it developed after the two groups collaborated with each other. Her thesis stresses that the Israeli-Druze decision to fight along side the Zionist forces was a shrewd “political calculation.”<sup>10</sup> Using sources from Israeli archives Parsons gives a detailed account of how Syrian-Druze soldiers fighting in the Arab Liberation Army were eventually integrated into Moshe Dayan’s brigade and their role in combat. She also focuses a great deal on the efforts of Israelis to cultivate relationships with the Druze elite and how this eventually shifted the Druze from neutrality to fighting in the Zionist army.

The Israeli-Druze have been able to carve out a somewhat prestigious position in Israel in comparison to other Arab minorities, however inequality in relation to Jews remains an issue for the Israeli-Druze community. In *Druze and Jew in Israel: A Shared Destiny?* Zaydān ‘Aṭashī, a former member of the Israeli foreign service and member of Knesset, seeks to unite the Druze and Jews through common trends in their historical experience.<sup>11</sup> Among the common historical experience of the Druze and Jews he mentions the efforts of Jews to assimilate with European culture during the Diaspora and the years of persecution and discrimination they experienced in “exile.” According to ‘Aṭashī these experience parallel with the persecution and oppression the Druze have faced in the Levant. This work is less a true scholarly work and more of a politically motivated work seeking better treatment for the Druze within Israel. ‘Aṭashī asserts that the Israeli-Druze have done all that Israel has asked of them and have not received fair treatment in

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 144

<sup>11</sup> Zeidan Atashi, *Druze and Jews in Israel: A Shared Destiny?* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1995).

return. ‘Aṭashī uses a question mark in the title of the book to insinuate that it is up to the Israeli government whether or not this so-called shared destiny has a future.

As mentioned earlier the number of in depth academic works on the Israeli-Druze are very limited. There are a number of smaller academic papers that contribute significantly to our understanding of the Israeli-Druze community and are therefore worth mentioning. Deborah Court, Randa Abbas, and Shmuel Shamai all examine the role of the Druze education system in Israel and how it impacts the community both in the Golan Heights and Israel proper. Court and Abbas specifically examined the Druze heritage curriculum in the Israeli-Druze school system and how it impacts identity and prepares the Druze for compulsory military service.<sup>12</sup> Through interviews with both students and teachers in these schools they explain how Druze and Israeli identities are intertwined and how military service is often a major component of the Israeli-Druze identity. Dr. Shamai uses the concepts of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu to explain how Druze students in the Golan generate symbolic capital through anti-Israeli and pro-Syrian activities.<sup>13</sup> He explains how this symbolic capital often enables them to receive scholarships to study in the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc countries. His study highlights how both Syria and Israel compete for the loyalty and cooperation of the Golan Druze community in the field of education.

Identity is another popular topic among scholars writing about the Israeli-Druze. Lisa Hajjar criticizes Israel’s policies directed toward the Druze community and accuses the state of imposing identities on the population in the Golan Heights.<sup>14</sup> She asserts that this has been detrimental to the relationship between the Israeli-Druze community and the Golan-Druze

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<sup>12</sup> Deborah Court and Randa Abbas, "Role of Druze High Schools in Shaping Students Identity and Citizenship," *Education, Citizenship, and Social Justice*, 2010: 145-162.

<sup>13</sup> Shmuel Shamai, "Critical Sociology of Education Theory in Practice: The Druze Education in the Golan," *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 1990: 449-463.

<sup>14</sup> Hajjar.

community noting the low marriage rates that exist between them. She also criticizes how this has impacted gender roles and interactions in Druze society noting that Druze serving in the Israeli army develop views that contradict with traditional Druze ideas and practices concerning men and women. Mordechai Nisan problematizes Druze identity within the confines of the political arena in Israel.<sup>15</sup> He notes that the Druze simultaneously adhere to a strong sense of patriotism while admitting to feelings of discrimination and mistreatment by Israeli society. Nisan sees somewhat of a paradox in Israeli-Druze attitudes toward the state, saying they “vigorously defend” the state and its interests while “campaigning” against it for improved socio-economic conditions for the Druze community. Ilana Kaufman also touches on Israeli-Druze identity debating whether or not Israeli’s policies toward the Druze community is a form of ethnic manipulation.<sup>16</sup> She eventually sides with scholars like Firro and Hajjar asserting that Israel’s policies “threaten to undo the unique position of the Druze between Jews and Arabs.”<sup>17</sup>

The limited amount of scholarship addressing the Druze in Israel has left large gaps in the historical record of this community. There is very little scholarship devoted to the Druze who occupy the slopes of Mt. Hermon in the Golan Heights. There is still less scholarship dealing with issues of Druze solidarity in the midst of regional tension. These are topics that need to be studied in order to better understand this community that straddles some of the most volatile borders in the world and how their unique geographical location and the influence of states has shaped Druze identity. In a broader sense this study seeks to explain how minorities act within the limits of the nation-state and how both the society and government of the nation-state receive or reject minorities.

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<sup>15</sup> Mordechai Nisan, "The Druze in Israel: Questions of Identity, Citizenship, and Patriotism," *The Middle East Journal*, 2010: 575-596.

<sup>16</sup> Ilana Kaufman, "Ethnic Affirmation or Ethnic Manipulation: The Case of the Druze in Israel," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 2004: 53-82.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 53

## Theorizing the Influence of Nationalism in Identity Formation

A great deal of literature has been produced trying to describe the rise of nationalism and the emergence of the nation-state. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, published in 1983, asserts that nationalism and nations are a modern phenomena. Anderson describes the nation as an imagined political community. It is "imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them."<sup>18</sup> According to Anderson nationalism grew out of the emergence of print capitalism in Europe along with the demise of elite languages such as Latin. The circulation of new print media then began to unite people who had previously been divided by geographical barriers. Over time peoples in Europe and the Americas imagined themselves as part of a larger community connected by linguistic similarities sharing similar interests and histories.

Eric Hobsbawm contends that nations and nationalism are the result of invented traditions that link the modern nation to antiquity.<sup>19</sup> According to Hobsbawm traditions are invented by the elites (often the state) in order to "inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past."<sup>20</sup> Thus nations are constructed through invented traditions, ceremonies, rites, and histories that tie the modern nation to a gloried and immortal past. Both Hobsbawm and Anderson view the nation as a modern construct and result of various historical processes over the last three centuries.<sup>21</sup> These theories were attacked by scholars from the emerging field of subaltern studies who claimed that

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<sup>18</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006). 6

<sup>19</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and Terrance Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983). 6

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* 1

<sup>21</sup> Anderson's theory has been criticized for ignoring the subaltern in history. One scholar accuses Anderson of portraying "the nation as a cozy community of newspaper readers and anthem singers." (for more see Özırmı, 130-133) Scholars critiquing Hobsbawm assert that his "notion of invented traditions ... are in fact more akin to reconstruction or rediscovery of the ethnic past." (for more see Özırmı, 125-127).

Anderson and Hobsbawm universalized the ‘Western’ experience and ignored unique processes which led to the formation of alternative nationalisms in the colonial world.<sup>22</sup> Partha Chatterjee, one the leading voices in subaltern studies, argues that, “if the nationalisms of the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain modular forms already made available by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine?”<sup>23</sup> Chatterjee criticizes Anderson’s theory for denying colonized peoples their agency while imposing European nationalisms on these peoples. This is problematic in studying the colonized world. This study adopts a different perspective based on Anderson’s notion of the nation as imagined in opposition to and not imposed by colonial powers. In Anderson’s interpretation of [and then here reference to specific historical experiences around which he makes this point] Colonialism enabled disparate communities under a colonial administration to experience a shared history that led them to imagine themselves as a nation. As the elite within these new imagined communities rose to positions power and had invested interests in the nation-state they invented traditions to reinforce new imagined national identities.

Anderson’s and Hobsbawm’s claims that nationalism is a modern phenomena also came under the fire of scholars who abide by the nationalist claims that the nation is based in antiquity and is thus not a new phenomenon. Scholars adhering to these theories argue that nationality is natural to the human experience and that nations have their roots in ancient history.<sup>24</sup> This school of nationalist studies rejects the theories of both Anderson and Hobsbawm on the grounds that they make the nation a work of fiction while ignoring history.

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<sup>22</sup> Gyan Prakash, "Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Studies," *The American Historical Review*, December 1994: 1475-1490. 14

<sup>23</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). 5

<sup>24</sup> Umut Özirimli, *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd Edition (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).

While the words ‘imagined’ and ‘invented’ may seem to denote that the nation is a fabrication, it is nonetheless real as soon as it can be shown to lead citizens to act in relation to its perceived interests. Nations therefore are neither timeless nor are they fictitious, but are constructs of perceived truths that unite different peoples with sometimes limited commonalities. Nationalism therefore proves to be a versatile phenomenon, depending on the territory and communities in relation to which it has been mobilized. The nationalist narrative with its invented traditions can be perceived with stark differences by various members of the nation. While nationalism and the interests of the nation often differ from town to town and from citizen to citizen, the nation’s strength lies in the consensus that can emerge among its citizens over who is a member of the nation.

The success of nationalisms and nation-states relies on people self-identifying with both nationalist ideologies and its institutions. Therefore in order to properly understand the effect of nationalism on society we must understand identity and identity formation. For the purpose of this paper, identity “refers to the defining characteristic of an individual or group” or category.<sup>25</sup> Therefore a person who speaks French, is a Canadian citizen of African descent, and worships at a Catholic church may have more than one identity. These identities are constructed through processes of self-differentiation from and self-identification with various social, religious, and political signifiers.<sup>26</sup> The modern concept of identity is both multi-faceted and hierarchical.<sup>27</sup> The preeminence of an individual’s competing identities will often shift according the political and social circumstance of the environment in which an individual resides.

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<sup>25</sup> Encyclopedia of Political Theory, "Identity," <http://www.credoreference.com.library.aucegypt.edu:2048/entry/sagept/identity> (accessed May 19, 2012).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005). 21

It can hardly be questioned that, broadly speaking, the Druze of Syria, Lebanon, and Israel, whether secular or religious, share a strong sense of communal identity. Within the Druze community national identity has tended to take second to their Druze identity. Therefore as both Arab nationalists and Israeli authorities have sought the loyalty of the Druze, they have had to confront the question of how to imagine them as part of or in relation to their nation. For Arab nationalists and later Syria this meant defining the Druze as a sub-category of the Arab nation. They argued that the Druze culture, tradition, religion<sup>29</sup>, and language are to a considerable extent to those of Arabs and therefore that they must be part of the Arab nation. The Israelis tried less to imagine the Druze as part of their nation instead opting to invent an Israeli-Druze nationalism in relation to Zionism intertwining the history and interests of the Druze and Jewish people. They did this by foregrounding the Druze and Jewish prophet Jethro claiming that the two peoples held common ancestry that bound them together. They also argued that both the Druze and Jews had historically been victims of both Muslim and Christian oppression and that the only way to ensure their freedom would be the establishment and preservation of the state of Israel. This study is concerned with the national identities of the Druze under Israeli rule and how these identities have created new schisms within the community with no historical precedent.

### **Sources and Methodology**

This work is derived from a variety of sources addressing different aspects of the Israeli-Druze and Syrian-Druze history. The early chapters of this study rely heavily on *Minorities in the Middle East: The Druze Communities 1840-1974* edited by Beitullah Destani. These four volumes or primary source documents consists of over 2000 pages of political dispatches,

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<sup>29</sup> The issue of whether or not Druze are Muslims is another matter that will not be addressed in this study. Several Druze I spoke with described themselves as being an Islamic sect.



correspondences, and reports concerning the Druze communities in the Levant from the middle of the nineteenth century to the late twentieth century. These documents are largely derived from both the British and French Foreign Services and deal with the political activities of Druze leaders and their relations with the Ottoman, French, British, Syrian, and Israeli authorities. While these documents reveal the participation of the common Druze in rebellions against outside forces, they tell us little about their views on the political developments during the time period covered during this study. These documents paint a general picture of the evolution of political thought within the Druze community and their stance toward the nation-state.

These records of Druze dealing complement those from the Central Zionist Archives used by scholars like Kais Firro and Laila Parsons in their studies of the Israeli-Druze. These primary sources made available through Firro's and Parsons' work paint a picture of the continual discussion withing the Zionist leadership concerning the Druze. These documents also reveal the attitudes of some of the members of the Zionist leadership toward the Druze and which Druze leaders were receptive to the Zionist overtures toward them.

The later chapters of this study relies heavily on newspapers articles either from Israeli or international print media regarding the political activities of the Druze in Israel and the occupied Golan-Heights. These articles detail the Israeli-Druze community's grievances toward the state of Israel and the Golan-Druze community's continued relationship with Syria and their resistance to Israel's efforts to impose citizenship upon them. These newspaper articles allow me to flesh out the context of the Druze's relationship with the state and their evolving view of citizenship and identity. These news media sources are supplemented by a series of interviews I conducted with members of the Druze communities in Israel and the occupied Golan Heights over a brief one week period in March and April 2012. I chose to conduct the majority of these interviews

with interlocutors living in the Golan-Heights due to the limited academic works dealing with this community. I tried in my interviews to reflect a plurality of views, speaking to people working for Israel in the field of education, people who were graduate of the Israeli-Druze school system, people who studied in Syria, and elderly Druze who had reached adulthood in the Golan Heights prior to 1967., in addition to more random interlocutors. In all, I made twelve interviews, with interlocutors ranging from the ages of 17 to 72.

The political sensitivity of the region in relation not only to the occupation of the Golan Heights but also to the current situation in Syria in combination with the close knit communal nature of the Druze community presented significant obstacles for this study. Additionally time constraints limited the number of interviews I was able to conduct with Druze interlocutors. In spite of these obvious limitations, these interviews were productive and yielded useful information to complement my other sources and to to flesh out, to an extent, current Druze attitudes toward citizenship and nationality in the Golan Heights. Building on these sources this paper seeks to examine how Druze national identities have been both imagined and invented in Israel and the Golan Heights.

This study consists of four chapters and an epilogue. The first chapter discusses the origins of the Druze and an overview of their history up to 1930 demonstrating long-established attitudes of the community toward political authority outside of their community. The second chapter details both Zionist and Arab nationalist relations with the Druze in the Levant and how these relations evolved as both the Israeli and Syrian states were established. This chapter also details the competition between Israelis and Syrian Arab nationalists to gain the loyalty of the Druze and integrate them into their polities. The third chapter focuses on the development of the Israeli-Druze curriculum and the early years of Israeli occupation of the Golan-Heights as well as

Syria's attempts to maintain influence in the Golan Heights after 1967. The fourth chapter discusses the Golan-Druze's rejection of Israeli citizenship and the multitude of ways in which Syria has reached out to them while detailing the growing influence of Arab nationalism among the Israeli-Druze. The epilogue looks to the future of national identity and questions whether or not the nation can be unimagined.

## Interference and Resistance: The Druze in History

The earliest studies of the Druze, or more accurately the *muwḥḥidūn*<sup>30</sup> as they refer to themselves, tied the origins of the sect to a number of Semitic faiths predating Islam such as Mandaism, Samaritanism, and Judaism.<sup>31</sup> While the Druze traditions borrows many ideas from some of these preceding faiths the sect's origins are found in the reign of the enigmatic Fāṭimid Caliph Al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh in Cairo.<sup>32</sup> The Fāṭimid Caliph is best known for his strange behavior and his arbitrary policies, which included the order to kill all of the dogs in Cairo, a ban on the making of women's footwear and the sale and consumption of *mulukhiyya*, and the resumption of sartorial requirements for Christians and Jews.<sup>33</sup> The unusual and distinct character of al-Ḥākim combined with the anticipation of the imminent appearance of the *mahdī*, which was ubiquitous among Ismailis during the Caliph's lifetime, led some to believe that al-Ḥākim was the *mahdī* and later God.<sup>34</sup>

The precise year when faith in al-Ḥākim's divinity began to develop in Cairo is difficult to narrow down, yet by the time it was first proclaimed publicly in 1017 it had already developed a sizeable following. It did not take long for opposition to the new faith to become violent. In January 1019 al-Akhrām, a man considered by many scholars to be the first to publicly declare al-Ḥākim's divinity, was murdered en route to visit the Caliph.<sup>35</sup> Later that same year in June pogroms erupted against adherents to the inchoate sect in and around Cairo. In the aftermath of the events of June, al-Ḥākim attempted to rectify the situation by firing the police chief in Fustat.

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<sup>30</sup> Translated from Arabic as either monotheists or Unitarians.

<sup>31</sup> Hitti. 24

<sup>32</sup> Paul E. Walker, *Caliph of Cairo: al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah, 996-1021* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2009). 252

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 65

<sup>34</sup> Kais Firro, "The Druze Faith: Origin, Development, and Interpretation," *Arabica* (Brill), 2011: 76-99. 85

<sup>35</sup> Walker. 254

While it appears that al-Ḥākim never formally endorsed the inchoate sect<sup>36</sup> that would later become the Druze, he did seem to protect their right to continue to spread their message.<sup>37</sup> In 1021 al-Ḥākim disappeared while riding his donkey on the outskirts of Cairo.<sup>38</sup> According to the Druze al-Ḥākim returned to his divine form again concealing himself from mortality; thus the lack of any evidence confirming al-Ḥākim's death or whereabouts reinforced belief in his divinity. With al-Ḥākim gone the Druze quickly became the target of the new regime's hope of eradicating the memory of the strange Caliph.

The Caliph's successor Abū Ḥasan al-Zāhir promptly repudiated any claims of al-Ḥākim's divinity and proclaimed that all those who held such a belief would be destroyed.<sup>39</sup> The new Caliph unleashed a fury of persecution against the inchoate sect that reached as far away as Aleppo and Antioch forcing the Druze to go into seclusion. After seven years in seclusion the Druze leaders Ḥamza and Bahā' al-Dīn again resumed their missionary work in 1027. According to Druze scripture the new religion was preached throughout the world and Druze communities were established in the Levant, India, and Yemen although only the Levantine community remains today.<sup>40</sup> Druze evangelizing continued until 1043 when it abruptly came to a halt and the Druze stopped accepting converts.<sup>41</sup> It is at this time that the historian Phillip Hitti asserts, "The Druze religion ceased to be simply a religion and its followers became a distinct

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<sup>36</sup> This is a matter of contention among scholars. Robert Brenton Betts asserts that al-Ḥākim's divinity was self-declared; however Paul Walker disagrees noting that the most virulent opposition to the Druze came from al-Ḥākim's administration.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 246

<sup>38</sup> The most widely held belief is that he was killed by hired hands of his sister Sitt al-Mulk, despite the discovery of his hamstrung mule and his bloody robes there is no consensus about his fate. Christian tradition states that he received a vision castigating him for his ill treatment of Christians and he converted and lived out his days as a monk. Others contend that instead he instead sought a life of solitude and traveled east spending the rest of his days as a mendicant. Of course the Druze believe that he again took his divine form as an incomprehensible deity. For more detail see Walker p 260-261.

<sup>39</sup> Nejla M. Abu-Izzeddin, *The Druzes: A New Study of their History, Faith, and Society* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1984). 106; Walker. 268

<sup>40</sup> Abu-Izzeddin. 110

<sup>41</sup> Firro. 92

nation.”<sup>42</sup> After 1043 the Druze seem to disappear from history until the sixteenth-century appearing only briefly during the Crusades.

In order to understand Druze society it is important to discuss certain elements of Druze theology. Druze theology was heavily influenced by a variety of philosophies and theologies including Neo-Platonic philosophy, Gnosticism, Islam, Christianity and ancient Persian religion.<sup>43</sup> Drawing from these ideologies the pioneers of the Druze movement adopted and emphasized that the scriptures and words of their prophets held both a literal and symbolic or allegorical meaning.<sup>44</sup> *Zāhir*, the literal meaning, is openly shared with members of the Druze community while *bāṭin*, the esoteric or hidden meaning, is only available to those who are initiated into the inner-circle that comprises the Druze spiritual elite.<sup>45</sup> This belief has bifurcated Druze society between the *‘uqqāl* (initiated or wise) and the *juhḥāl* (ignorant).<sup>46</sup> Only the *‘uqqāl* are allowed access to sacred texts and are allowed to attend the full worship service.

The Druze view the five pillars of Islam as tenets for those who only accept the outward meaning of the Qur’an and have developed seven principles which supersede them and by which every Druze must abide. These principles are: 1) truthfulness, 2) mutual aid to all Druze, 3) abandoning previous forms of worship, 4) renunciation of belief inconsistent with *tawḥīd*,<sup>47</sup> 5) belief that the doctrine of unity was preached in every age, 6) acceptance of God’s works whether good or ill, and 7) submission to God’s will.<sup>48</sup> While not among the seven obligatory

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<sup>42</sup> Hitti. 12

<sup>43</sup> Walker attributes the belief in al-Ḥākim as God incarnate to Christian influences while Hitti asserts that this was the result of pre-Islamic Persian religions. Abu-Izzeddin goes into a great deal about how Neo-Platonic thought played in the formation of Druze doctrine. See Walker p 267, Hitti p 32-33, Abu-Izzeddin p 89-96

<sup>44</sup> Firro. “The Druze Faith: Origin, Development, and Interpretation.” 84

<sup>45</sup> The process of being initiated into the inner fold of the Druze is complicated and shrouded in secrecy and can last many years. See Robert Brenton Betts, *The Druze* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988). 22-23

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 77

<sup>47</sup> Strict Monotheism, *tawḥīd* encompasses the Druze belief in God’s incomprehensible oneness, He is without description or understanding.

<sup>48</sup> Firro. “The Druze Faith: Origin, Development, and Interpretation.” 90; Betts. 19

principles of Druze theology secrecy has been important to the faiths longevity and survival through periods of intense persecution. According to Nejla Abu-Izzeddin, “The secrecy is partly *taqīyya*, the concealment of ones religious affiliation when the person or community is in danger . . . A more important reason for secrecy is the concern to keep the faith from the reach of those who, being unprepared to accept its message, could misinterpret and corrupt its truth.”<sup>49</sup> The Druze’s penchant for secrecy creates difficulties for non-Druze who study the sect. Histories of the Druze are rife with rumors, speculations, and outright falsehoods due to the tendency toward secrecy of those who adhere to Druze theology.

As the tenets of the young religion began to crystallize around 1043 Druze communities were largely relegated to the mountainous terrain that composes modern Lebanon, Syria, and Israel. In these lands a feudal form of governance developed among the Druze community some time between the closing of the faith and the crusades.<sup>50</sup> The Druze relied heavily on agriculture and developed a reputation as fierce warriors when provoked to violence. Led by the powerful Tanūkh and Arslān families the Druze helped expel the Franks during the Crusades.<sup>51</sup> In the disarray caused by the Crusades Druze chieftains carved small autonomous state in the hills along the coast of Syria and Palestine.<sup>52</sup> The account of Benjamin Tudela, a Jewish adventurer who visited Palestine during the Crusades, attests to the fierceness and autonomy of the Druze.

Ten miles there from a people dwell who are at war with the men of Sidon; they are called Druses, and are pagans of a lawless character. They inhabit the mountains and the clefts of rocks; they have no king or ruler but dwell independent in these high places, and their border extends to Mount Hermon which is a three-days journey . . . they roam over the mountains and hills and no man can do battle with them.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Abu-Izzeddin. 119

<sup>50</sup> Hitti. 5

<sup>51</sup> Abu-Izzeddin. 140

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* 133

<sup>53</sup> Benjamin Tudela, *The Itinerary of Benjamin Tudela: Travels in the Middle Ages* (London: Nightengale Resources, 1983). 79

The Druze developed a reputation for being fierce warriors early on in their history. They engaged in combat during the Crusades when it served their purposes and played a key role in driving the Europeans from Palestine.<sup>54</sup> As the Druze solidified their hold on the mountainous terrain in the hills of Syria they developed a reputation for rebelling against state authority.<sup>55</sup>

The Druze's rebelliousness may stem from a divine mandate that forbids obedience to the commands of an unjust ruler.<sup>56</sup> Druze rebellions against the state became more frequent in the years after the Ottoman conquest in 1516. By 1523 the Ottoman governor of Damascus was waging campaigns against the Druze in attempts to bring them into compliance with the authorities in Istanbul.<sup>57</sup> The Ottomans devastated the Druze community of the Shūf in 1523 and began targeting the leadership of the community in an effort to control the Druze. In 1544 the governor of Damascus, Mustafa Pasha, invited the Druze emir Fakhr al-Dīn I to Damascus and when he arrived he had him killed.<sup>58</sup> During the sixteenth century the Druze were in a state of constant rebellion against the Ottoman authorities refusing to pay taxes to the Sulṭan or accept his authority.<sup>59</sup> During the middle years of the sixteenth-century the Ottoman governors of Damascus conducted a number of military campaigns against the Druze hoping to subdue their rebellious spirit. Frustrated by their inability to rein in the indomitable Druze the Ottomans opened a massive campaign against the Druze in 1585 that included a naval assault on the coasts of Syria.<sup>60</sup> The Ottoman military campaign crushed the Druze rebellion killing thousands, confiscating weapons, and collecting taxes. Despite the success of the 1585 campaign Ottoman

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<sup>54</sup> One of the most common myths of the Druze origin stem from a French Crusader colony that intermarried with the native population in today's Lebanon and Palestine. However there is little evidence to support this theory.

<sup>55</sup> Hitti.

<sup>56</sup> Abu-Izzeddin. 125

<sup>57</sup> Abdul Rahim Abu-Husayn, *The View From Istanbul: Lebanon and the Druze Emirate in Ottoman Chancery Documents, 1546-1711* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003). 14-15

<sup>58</sup> Betts. 72

<sup>59</sup> Abu-Husayn. *The View from Istanbul*. 24-33

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 16



control was short-lived as the Druze began to conduct trade agreements with Europe and amass firearms.

The rise of Fakhr al-Dīn II in the early seventeenth-century represents the height of Druze power and the level of contempt they felt toward the Ottomans. As the Ottoman Empire began to decline feudal chiefs throughout Syria began to assert their autonomy. ‘Ali Jānbulād, an ancestor of the powerful Junbalāṭ family in Lebanon, defied the Sulṭan and carved his own independent fiefdom stretching from Adana in the North to Hama in the South out of the Ottoman Empire. He went so far as to mint his own coins and to order the recitation of his name during Friday prayer.<sup>61</sup> With the Ottomans’ attention focused on Jānbulād’s affront to their authority, Fakhr al-Dīn quietly began building his own state in the Lebanese Mountains. After crushing Jānbulād in 1609 the Ottomans turned their attention toward Fakhr al-Dīn who was forced to flee to Italy in 1613 leaving his kingdom under the control of his son only to return five years later.<sup>62</sup>

In the absence of Fakhr al-Dīn the local Ottoman authorities tried unsuccessfully to unseat al-Dīn’s family from their position in Shūf. When Fakhr al-Dīn returned after five years in self-imposed exile most of his small kingdom remained intact. Fakhr al-Dīn’s army decimated Ottoman forces sent from Damascus to unseat him in 1623.<sup>63</sup> After capturing the Ottoman governor in Damascus Fakhr al-Dīn expanded his kingdom to include nearly all of greater Syria.<sup>64</sup> During Fakhr al-Dīn’s reign agriculture flourished and a thriving silk trade developed with the merchant states of the Mediterranean.<sup>65</sup> Fakhr al-Dīn’s independence from the Ottoman Sulṭan are reflected in his actions. He openly welcomed Christians into this army, a

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<sup>61</sup> Abu-Izzeddin. 183

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 185

<sup>63</sup> Betts. 73

<sup>64</sup> Abu-Husayn. 21

<sup>65</sup> Abu-Izzeddin. 194

policy that would be condemned by the Ottomans. His ultimate act of defiance came in 1631 when he refused entry into Syria for the Ottoman army returning from an unsuccessful campaign to reclaim Baghdad.<sup>66</sup> This act would eventually provoke the wrath of the Ottoman authorities, who would later turn their attention to Fakhr al-Dīn and the small state he had carved out from the Empire. In 1633 Ottoman forces captured Fakhr al-Dīn and his two sons and returned Syria to the Sulṭān.<sup>67</sup>

Following the disposal of Fakhr al-Dīn II and his sons the Druze would continue to rebel against the Ottoman authorities from time to time but would never again experience the same level of success. Later Druze rebellions in the seventeenth-century were triggered by tax collection and military service.<sup>68</sup> The intrusiveness of the Ottoman authorities into the lives of the Druze declined in the eighteenth-century, a period of Druze history which is characterized by internal divisions. At the end of the seventeenth-century the Druze Ma'n dynasty fell from power being replaced by the Sunni Shihāb family. Following the death of the first Shihāb emir a dispute arose between the local factions and a battle ensued at 'Ayn Dāra.<sup>69</sup> This battle resulted in a large migration of Druze to the Ḥawrān plain in what is today southwestern Syria. The Druze strength in Ḥawrān grew so much during the eighteenth-century that by its end the region began to be called the Jabāl al-Druze. The upheavals in the Druze community continued as chieftains feuded over the leadership within the community. The Junblāt family that is still prominent in Lebanon today rose to prominence at this time.

The turbulences of the nineteenth century brought with it a new wave of Druze rebellion against outside authority. A fierce rivalry developed between the Druze Junblāts and their

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<sup>66</sup> Abdul Rahim Abu-Husayn, *Provincial Leadership in Syria, 1575-1650* (Beirut: American University of Beirut Press, 1985). 125

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. 126

<sup>68</sup> Abu-Husayn. *The View from Istanbul*. 23

<sup>69</sup> Abu-Izzeddin. 202

follower and the Ottoman sanctioned Shihāb emirs at the outset of the nineteenth century and in 1820 another Druze insurrection broke out.<sup>70</sup> In 1825 Emir Bashīr Shihāb, aided by a Turkish army from Palestine, quelled the insurrection prompting more Druze to flee to the Ḥawrān.<sup>71</sup> Muḥammad ‘Alī’s occupation of Syria from 1833 to 1840 prompted another series of revolts against the state. When Ibrāhīm Pasha requested new conscripts from Druze villages, the inhabitants refused saying that they would fight together but would not join the Egyptian army.<sup>72</sup> Armed resistance broke out first in the Ḥawrān and later in the foothills of Mt. Hermon in the Golan Heights. The initial expedition sent to collect these new conscripts was decimated.<sup>73</sup> Eventually Ibrāhīm Pasha himself led an army of twenty thousand against the Druze. During these revolts the Druze flocked to the besieged villages to assist their co-religionists in their fight. Having exhausted his resources Ibrāhīm Pasha resorted to poisoning water sources and arming Christians in order to squash the Druze.<sup>74</sup>

Relations between Christians and Druze were strained in the early nineteenth century. The tension created by the rivalry between the Christian emir Bashīr Shihāb’s and the Druze Junblāts was exacerbated by the Egyptian administration’s decision to arm Christians in an effort to pacify the Druze of Syria. After the British, acting on behalf of the Sultan, expelled Ibrāhīm Pasha’s army tension between Christians and Druze was on the rise.<sup>75</sup> Worried by the Franco-Maronite alliance many Druze chieftains encouraged an alliance with Britain for their

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid. 214

<sup>71</sup> Betts. 77

<sup>72</sup> Abu-Izzeddin. 216

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 217

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. 218-219

<sup>75</sup> Hugh Rose, "Letter from Colonel Hugh Rose to Sir Stratford Canning, 2 July 1845," in *Minorities in the Middle East: The Druze Community, 1840-1974*, Vol. 1, ed. Bejtullah Destani (Archive Editions Limited, 2006), 327-337.

protection.<sup>76</sup> During this period of tension the Druze still resisted Ottoman conscription requests. After a visit to the Ḥawrān, Richard Wood wrote to his superiors that the Druze chieftains there refused “to furnish a single recruit.”<sup>77</sup>

In May 1860 violence between Christians and Druze erupted into a full-scale civil war in Mount Lebanon. Druze from the Ḥawrān rushed to assist their brethren in the slaughter of Christians.<sup>78</sup> By the time French forces arrived in Lebanon the Druze had dispatched over twelve thousand Christians. Druze soldiers from the Ḥawrān coming to the aid of their coreligionists during the communal violence that erupted in 1860 is a good example of the unity with which the community acted before the emergence of the nation-state in the Levant. For the sake of this work the united actions of the Druze in moments of stress is important, however the narrative used here simplifies the complex history behind this outbreak of sectarian violence between Christians and Druze which is beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>79</sup> Following the events of 1860 European influence and those Christians allied with Europe were in the ascendant in Mount Lebanon.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century the Druze in the Jabal al-Druze in the Ḥawrān maintained their autonomy despite Ottoman efforts to expand the state and reform the law. Periodically this led to minor clashes between Turkish troops and the Druze. The Druze of the Ḥawrān developed and benefited from important commercial links with Damascus as the region

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<sup>76</sup> N. Moore, “Letter from N. Moore to Viscount Palmerston, June 2 1841,” *Minorities in the Middle East: Druze Communities, 1840-1975*, Vol. 1, ed. Bejtullah Destani (Archive Editions Limited, 2006), 35-39.

<sup>77</sup> Richard Wood, “Letter from Richard Wood to the Earl of Malmesbury, 7 December 1852,” *Minorities in the Middle East: The Druze Community, 1840-1974* (Archive Editions Limited, 2006), 479-489.

<sup>78</sup> J. Brant, “Letter from J. Brant to Lord J. Russell, 18 June 1860,” *Minorities in the Middle East: The Druze Community, 1840-1976*, Vol. 2, ed. Bejtullah Destani (Archive Editions Limited, 2006), 52-55.

<sup>79</sup> According to Ussama Makdisi the events of 1860 were the result of newly forming perceptions of the role of faith in the public sphere that were challenging a quasi-secular feudal ruling system in Lebanon. The forces behind these new perceptions were the result of European colonial endeavors in Greater Syria that also influenced Ottoman reforms. These endeavors included missionary and commercial activities. For more see Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

began to be incorporated into the Ottoman economy in the nineteenth century.<sup>80</sup> In 1910 the Ottomans sent an army to the Ḥawrān in order to obtain new conscripts and collect taxes. Druze leaders from Mount Lebanon traveled to the Ḥawrān in hopes of assisting their brethren in the situation.<sup>81</sup> There was little resistance when the Ottoman army arrived in the Ḥawrān and they succeeded in collecting taxes and conscripts, however their prolonged stay and decision to disarm the Druze caused a stir among the Druze and the Ottomans arrested five sheikhs they accused of inciting rebellion.<sup>82</sup>

Druze loyalty to the Ottoman state was precarious at the outbreak of World War I. Druze conscripts such as Sulṭan al-Aṭrash fought alongside Ottoman soldiers despite a general distrust of Ottoman authority. When the British sponsored Arab Revolt arrived in the Ḥawrān many Druze leaders agreed to join Fayṣal's army on the condition that the Jabal al-Druze be granted autonomous self-rule.<sup>83</sup> Despite the success of the Arab Revolt, Syria was turned over to the French shortly after the war.

The French occupation of Syria divided Druze sympathies. The Aṭrash family that had come to dominate Druze politics in the Ḥawrān openly opposed French rule going so far as to threaten a revolt of "30,000 able-bodied men" should the French try and maintain a military occupation of their lands.<sup>84</sup> A draft of a proposed constitution for an independent Druze state in the Jabal al-Druze was submitted to the French in March 1921. The constitution stated that:

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<sup>80</sup> Provence, 13, 32

<sup>81</sup> G.P. Devey, "Consular Dispatch from G.P. Devey to Sir G.A. Lowther, 22 August 1910," *Minorities in the Middle East: The Druze Community, 1840-1974*, ed. Bejtullah Destani (Archive Editions Limited, 2006), 230-233.

<sup>82</sup> G.P. Devey, "Consular Dispatch from G.P. Devey to Sir G. Lowther, 30 September 1910," *Minorities in the Middle East: The Druze Community, 1840-1974*, Vol. 3, ed. Bejtullah Destani (Archive Editions Limited, 2006), 246-247.

<sup>83</sup> Provence. 42

<sup>84</sup> C. Palmer, "Consular Dispatch from C. Palmer to Lord Curzon, 19 February 1921," *Minorities in the Middle East: The Druze Community, 1840-1974*, Vol. 3, ed. Bejtullah Destani (Archive Editions Limited, 2006), 305-306.

“The Druze Government will accept financial and economic help from the French, but refuses to belong to an eventual unified Syria, except for commercial purposes. The French have no right to interfere in the internal affairs of the Druze state, the native of which should not be liable to military service, nor to be disarmed.”<sup>85</sup> The oppressive French mandatory administration failed to mollify the recalcitrant Druze and in 1925 the Druze leader Sulṭan al-Aṭrash instigated a rebellion in the Jabal al-Druze that would spread throughout Syria seriously threatening the mandate.<sup>86</sup>

In June 1925 a delegation of Druze sheikhs petitioned the mandatory government requesting “basic law, an end to arbitrary judgment and imprisonment, the guarantee of personal freedom, and freedom of speech.”<sup>87</sup> When these requests were ignored Sulṭan al-Aṭrash organized a political demonstration in front of the council building in Suwaydā on July 3<sup>rd</sup>. The protest became violent and shots were fired when the French authorities tried to clear the Druze protesters from streets. The next day attempts to mediate the conflict failed and the French demanded the payment of 100 Ottoman gold pounds and the detention of twenty Druze youths and one Ḥusayn Murshid.<sup>88</sup> When it was discovered that Murshid had fled to Transjordan, the French authorities ordered the demolition of his home. When news of this decision spread throughout the community a large number of armed Druze men from surrounding villages flocked to defend Murshid’s home. Under the leadership of al-Aṭrash the Druze men forced the French authorities from the premises.

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<sup>85</sup> Farhan Sharaf, "Proposed Constitution of an Independent Druze State, March 1921," *Minorities in the Middle East: The Druze Community, 1840-1974*, Vol. 3, ed. Bejtullah Destani (Archive Editions Limited, 2006), 308.

<sup>86</sup> During their colonial experiment in Mandate Syria the French took advantage of the diversity that existed in region by reinforcing sectarian identities with the purpose of dividing the population to prevent a united uprising against the French government.

<sup>87</sup> Provence. 53

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. 55

The French authorities determined the Atrash family was cause of the unrest and invited five of the Atrash sheikhs to Damascus to discuss the grievances of the Druze intending to arrest them on arrival.<sup>89</sup> When news reached the Ḥawrān that three of the sheikhs had been arrested Sulṭan al-Atrash began calling for a general revolt and organizing a resistance movement. On 22 July the Druze attacked and decimated a French garrison near Suwaydā.<sup>90</sup> News of the French defeat spread rapidly by word of mouth throughout Syria and ignited an uprising that by September 1925 spread to all of the major cities in mandate Syria.<sup>91</sup> When news of the revolt reached the Druze in Palestine a group travelled to the Ḥawrān to assist their co-religionists in distress.<sup>92</sup> This conflict would continue until the spring of 1927 when the French were finally able to put down the insurrection that had begun in the Jabal al-Druze.

At the eve of Arab independence the history of the Druze in relation to the state was characterized by rebellion and insurrection. For the better part of four centuries of Ottoman rule the Druze had avoided both conscription and paying taxes and when the Ottomans were able to subdue Druze autonomy, it was nearly always short lived. During their twenty-six year rule of Syria the French expended both blood and resources in large quantities to enforce their will on the Druze. The resilience of the Druze lay not only in their fierce resistance to oppression but also in their strong tradition of communal solidarity. This solidarity has been demonstrated by the Druze willingness to assist their coreligionists in conflict as evidenced in the communal violence of 1860.<sup>93</sup> According to Druze academic Nejla Abu Izzeddin, “Solidarity is basic to Druze society and has deep roots. A feeling of brotherhood pervades the community, which the

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid. 56

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 59

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 87

<sup>92</sup> Laila Parson, *The Druze Between Palestine and Israel, 1947-1949* (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 2000).

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<sup>93</sup> Brant.

Druzes refer to as the community.<sup>94</sup> The coming chapters demonstrate how the creation of the nation-state and with it new national identities have challenged Druze communal solidarity.

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<sup>94</sup> Abu-Izzeddin. 223



## From Rebels to Citizens

The Great Syrian Revolt in 1925 established the strategic importance of the Druze for both Arab Nationalist and Zionist leaders. The Druze history of autonomy and rebellion caused concern among both Arab nationalists and Zionists about how the Druze might react should a war break out between Arabs and the increasingly large Jewish population in Palestine. These fears led to a competition between Arabs and Zionists for the hearts and minds of the Druze. Because the Druze did not fit neatly into the narrative of the young Zionist cause, the Zionist leadership engaged in a process of securing Druze loyalty by granting economic privileges to the Druze, imagining a new shared history of the Druze, and reinforcing this imagined history through the invention of tradition. In response the Arab Nationalist leaders continually asserted the Arabness of the Druze while reacting violently against elements of the community who appeared to either cooperate with the Jewish administration or remain neutral in the conflict. Due to the solidarity that existed among the Druze at this time the competition that developed between Arab nationalists and Zionists for their loyalty was directed toward the greater Druze community living in Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine.<sup>95</sup> This chapter will discuss the competition between Arab Nationalists and Zionists for the hearts and minds of the Druze in both the years leading up to the 1948 War and their integration into the states of both Syria and Israel in the years after the war.

### **Zionism and the Druze during the British Mandate**

The Zionist administration in Palestine first took interest in the Druze after the French had quelled their rebellion in Syria in 1927. The participation of Palestinian-Druze in the rebellion and the Syrian-Druze who sought refuge in Palestine was cause for concern. Sulṭan al-

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<sup>95</sup> Yaov Gelber, "Antecedents of the Jewish-Druze Alliance in Palestine," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 1992: 352-373. 357

Atrash, a prominent Druze and leader of the Syrian revolt, had championed the cause of Arab nationalism while leading the rebellious Druze during the upheaval and this caused the Zionists to reach out to him in hopes of securing his loyalty.<sup>96</sup> In July 1930 the Jewish Agency sent Tuvia Ashkenazi to investigate the regions inhabited by the Druze.<sup>97</sup> Ashkenazi expresses both Zionist fears of and interests in the Druze in his report to the Jewish agency noting the Druze's dislike of Muslims and the likelihood of Druze fighting alongside other Arabs if a conflict were to occur and indicating the strength the Druze would bring to the Arab cause stating, "without the Druze, the Arabs are nothing."<sup>98</sup> As the probability of conflict grew so did efforts of Jewish agents to curry favor with the Druze.

In the early 1930's disputes arose among the Druze over the future of the community in relation to the state. While the Druze traveled freely to the villages of their co-religionists in Syria and Lebanon by the 1930's it was apparent that the borders of the emerging states of Syria, Lebanon, and Israel would one day separate them. Arab nationalist sympathies cultivated during the Syrian revolt were strong among segments of the community, however many Druze supported the traditional policy of independence. Druze Sheikhs supported a variety of stances on the matter often dividing villages. It was during this time that Zionist authorities first began building connections within the Palestinian-Druze community.<sup>99</sup> Gambling on the success of the Zionist cause two chiefs from the Abū Rukun family, Ḥasan and Zayid, began collaborating with the Jewish Agency.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Phillip Khoury, "Factionalism Among Syrian Nationalists During the French Mandate," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 1981: 441-469. 455

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. 352

<sup>98</sup> Tuvia Ashkenazi, "Ashkenazi's Report on his Tour of the Jabal Druze, 20-24 July 1930," *Ben-Zvi Files No. 2* (Hagana Archives). Quoted in Gelber. 352

<sup>99</sup> Kais Firro, *The Druzes in the Jewish State: A Brief History* (Leiden: Brill, 1999). 24

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. 26

As tensions rose in Palestine over the Jewish question, the Druze sought neutrality seeing the argument as being between Muslims and Jews. When violence erupted in 1936 the majority of the Druze took a neutral stance and avoided participation in the conflict. When the majority of the Druze did not join in the revolt, Arab nationalists distributed pamphlets in Druze villages in northern Palestine calling on them to unite in arms with the Arabs.<sup>101</sup> Reacting to these calls, some Palestinian-Druze joined Arab gangs that surrounded Haifa. A few bands of Syrian and Lebanese-Druze marched into Palestine and joined the Palestinian-Arabs in fighting against the British and Jews.<sup>102</sup> The Jewish Agency directed Yosef Nahmani and Abba Hushi to engage the Druze in a propaganda campaign against the revolt, urging Druze neutrality. Nahmani drafted a leaflet that was distributed in Druze villages in Northern Palestine. These leaflets extolled the economic benefits of a Jewish presence in Palestine while mentioning the abuses that Muslims had perpetrated against the Druze in the past. The pamphlet closed condemning Druze participation in the uprising while for the first time proclaiming an imagined past declaring that an, “understanding and a friendship had existed a long time ago between the Jews and Druze community.”<sup>103</sup> This is a tactic the Zionist leadership, when dealing with the Druze, have continued to use emphasizing a historical friendship or shared past between the two communities.

A prominent Jewish academic Eliahu Epstein writing in *Palestine and the Near East Economic Magazine* echoed the sentiments of Nahmani. In the article ‘The Druze people, Druze Community in Palestine: traditional friendship to the Jews’ Epstein painted the picture of two faiths sharing a common history of injustice at the hands of Arabs. The article distanced the

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<sup>101</sup> Laila Parsons, *The Druze Between Palestine and Israel, 1947-1949* (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 2000). 26

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Quotation of Nahmani's circular are taken from Firro, *A History of the Druzes*, p. 300

Druze from Muslims and used the doctrine of *taqīyya*, the concealment of ones religious affiliation when in danger, to ease Jewish concerns over the similarity of the Druze to Muslims. He also drew on this doctrine to display similarities between the *Marranos*<sup>104</sup> and the Druze. This article was not only directed toward the Druze, whom he hoped to ally with, but to Jews who were too leery to accept the Druze as potential friends after their limited participation in the bloody revolts of the previous two years.<sup>105</sup>

Syrian and Lebanese-Druze involvement in the Arab-Palestinian uprisings in 1936, although half-hearted, reinforced the importance of the greater Druze community to Zionist goals. A memorandum by Tuvia Cohen, a representative of the Jewish Agency to the Druze, in 1937 expresses the desire of Zionists to build closer ties to the greater Druze community.

This is the way - to establish spots of light and inspiration inside the dark Arab sea around us: one in Transjordan, a second in Lebanon, a third in Jabal Druze, a fourth elsewhere, etc. Perhaps we shall be able to consolidate them tomorrow into one bloc that will be inspired by us and will fortify our position. Only actions such as this will raise our image in the eyes of the major Arab governments and only they will force these rulers to take us into account as one of the principal factors in the Near East.<sup>106</sup>

The Druze community was integral to the plans of the Jewish Agency. Not only because alienating the Druze from the Arab nationalists would mean they would have one less enemy to fight but also because the Druze held powerful positions in nascent states of both Syria and Lebanon. As mentioned by Cohen, a Jewish friendly Druze community could be the means to securing favorable relations with their neighboring governments or at the very least they would be a potentially dangerous fifth-column in Syria and Lebanon if relations continued to remain antagonistic. More importantly the Palestinian-Druze continued to look toward the Syrian-

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<sup>104</sup> The Marranos were Spanish Jews who outwardly professed Christianity but continued to practice Judaism in private in order to avoid persecution.

<sup>105</sup> Eliahu Epstein, "The Druze People: Druze Community: Traditional Friendship of the Jews," *Palestine and Near East Economic Magazine*, May 29, 1939: 162-167.

<sup>106</sup> Tuvia Cohen, "About the Fate of Our Relations with the Druze People, 2 November 1937," *Central Zionist Archives S 25/3539* (London). Quoted in Gelber

Druze for leadership and it was possible that if the Druze community sided with the Arab nationalist they could become a dangerous fifth-column in the young Jewish state. With this in mind the Jewish agency renewed its efforts to pursue friendly ties with the broader Druze population.

As Arab efforts to stem the tide of Jewish immigration and expel the British continued to fail they began to direct their anger towards those who did not embrace the call to liberate Palestine. The Druze communities in northern Palestine were singled out and were the victims of periodic violence propagated by Arab nationalists. The Palestinian-Druze chiefs who had called for neutrality during the hostilities under the urging of Nahmani and Hushi now called on the Jewish Agency for protection.<sup>107</sup> Toward the end of 1938 Abba Hushi began a series of negotiations, with the approval of the Abu Rukun family, with a Syrian-Druze named Yusuf al-‘Aysami, who purportedly represented Sultan al-Atrash<sup>108</sup>, over the possible transfer of the Druze population in Palestine to the Jabal al-Druze in Syria.<sup>109</sup> The transfer plan called for the Jewish Agency to purchase the land of the Palestinian-Druze while the Druze leadership in the Jabal al-Druze prepared new land and villages for the roughly 17,000 Palestinian-Druze relocating to Syria. While negotiations between al-‘Asaymi and the Jewish Agency over the transfer plan continued sporadically for nearly seven years, it appears that they were never very close to reaching an agreement.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Parsons. 33

<sup>108</sup> Parsons doubts the authenticity of ‘Asaymi’s claims to represent al-Atrash and mentions that personal profit was most likely the goal for his duplicity. Gelber however asserts that ‘Asaymi was in league with al-Atrash and therefore truly represented the leadership of the Syrian-Druze. Publicly al-Atrash never admitted to any negotiations with the Jewish Agency.

<sup>109</sup> Gelber. 360

<sup>110</sup> It is highly unlikely should a deal have been reached by those negotiating that they would have been able to enforce such a deal as the violence directed against the Palestinian-Druze had subsided in the 1940’s. Parsons. 49

The prominence of the Jews in Palestine was on the rise in 1940s and this aided Zionist agents like Abba Hushi and Mordecai Shakhevitch in securing more contacts and support within the greater Druze community. While support for the Zionist cause was gaining momentum among the Palestinian-Druze there is little evidence to suggest that there was much support for the Zionists in the Jabal al-Druze despite their efforts to reach out to Sultan al- Atrash. Most Syrian-Druze remained neutral in regards to the Jewish presence in Palestine knowing that an openly antagonistic attitude could endanger their brethren in Palestine, who enjoyed neither their military strength nor communal independence. By 1947 factions were hardening over the issue of Jews in Palestine, however most Druze still remained neutral.

### **The 1948 War and Creation of the Israeli-Druze**

In November 1947 the United Nations voted to partition Palestine into two Arab and Jewish states. The decision was met by fierce opposition from the surrounding Arab states. In December 1947 skirmishes broke out between Palestinians and Jews as the British prepared to withdraw from Palestine thus ending the mandate experiment.<sup>111</sup> Pressure on Druze communities to align with either the Arabs or the Zionists increased as tensions between the two communities rose. Fawzī Qāwuqjī, a veteran of the Syrian Revolt who had been exiled in Palestine during the French rule of Syria, toured the Jabal al-Druze that same December campaigning for the Palestinian cause and seeking recruits to fight in the nascent Arab Liberation Army or ALA. According to a series of confidential telegraphs sent by the British consul in Damascus to the British Foreign office regarding the Druze and the issue of Palestine; it appears that Qāwuqjī's mission yielded few recruits and the overall mood of the Druze was

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<sup>111</sup> Parsons. 56

one of neutrality.<sup>112</sup> These telegraphs also reveal that the Druze of the Jabal al-Druze were not satisfied with the current government in Damascus and some favored siding with the Hashemite King Abdullah<sup>113</sup> should a conflict arise between Syria and Transjordan.<sup>114</sup> It is worth noting that Druze loyalty to Transjordan, where very few Druze lived possibly stemmed from the financial support King Abdullah had periodically distributed to the region through the Atrash family.

As violence escalated in Palestine the Druze for the most part remained neutral in the conflict. At this time communal bonds remained more important than loyalty to either the Zionist or Arab nationalist cause. This is demonstrated by the reaction of Shafa'amr, a pro-Zionist Druze village, to the arrival of a Druze battalion associated with the ALA from Syria in March. The villagers of Shafa'amr accommodated the Syrian Druze battalion despite pledging to their neighboring Jewish villages to remain neutral and to resist the urging of armed gangs. One villager expressed the contradiction felt by the community saying, "If Druze come how can we fight them rather than receive them."<sup>115</sup> The villagers attempted to dissuade the battalion commander Shakib Wahhab from attacking Jews but ultimately he led his soldiers into battle with the Hagana, the strongest of the Jewish militias.

Shakib Wahhab's unit responded to a distress call from the respected Arab nationalist Qāwuqjī, who was commanding the ALA units, and attacked the Jewish settlement of Ramat

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<sup>112</sup> Mr. Broadmead, "Mr. Broadmead Telegraph No. 580 From Damascus to the British Foreign Office regarding Qāwuqjī's visit, 30 December 1947," *Minorities in the Middle East: Druze Communities, 1840-1974*, Vol. 4, ed. Bejtullah Destani (Archive Editions Limited, 2006), 333.

<sup>113</sup> Sultan al-Atrash had often floated the idea of the Jabal al-Druze seceding from Syria and joining Transjordan where he had stayed in exile after the Syrian Revolution of 1925. It first appeared in the Spring of 1946 and appears frequently in diplomatic cables regarding the region. For more see Destani, B. *Minorities in the Middle East: Druze Communities* Vol. 4 p. 257-258, 277.

<sup>114</sup> Mr. Broadmead, "Telegraph No. 554 from Damascus to the British Foreign Office, 10 December 1947," *Minorities in the Middle East: Druze Communities, 1840-1974*, Vol. 4, ed. Bejtullah Destani (Archive Editions Limited, 2006), 331.

<sup>115</sup> Hagana Archives, 4 April 1948, 195/105 quoted from Parsons. *The Druze Between Israel and Palestine*. 63

Yohanán hoping to divert the attention of the Hagana militia which was besieging Qāwuqjī's unit on 6 April.<sup>116</sup> Wahhab's unit was initially successful, taking control of the settlement; however they were soon reengaged by the Hagana after a couple of days. Paying a heavy price the Hagana was able to secure the villages and force the Druze to retreat after ten days of fierce combat. The details of the Druze defeat are unclear as to why they failed. Wahhab put the blame on the Arab leadership in Damascus due to their delayed response despite his calls of assistance. Parsons mentions Wahhab's tactical mistake of withdrawing to Shafa'amr after nightfall while only leaving a small contingent behind.<sup>117</sup> The defeat left many of the Druze fighting in the ALA demoralized and many of them considered returning to their homes in Syria. Building on their success with elements of the Palestinian-Druze community the Zionist leadership began to lobby these disaffected soldiers for their support while Arab nationalists desperately sought Druze assistance in the escalating conflict.

After the Druze defeat by the Hagana the Jewish Agency arranged a secret meeting with the defeated Druze commanders through the pro-Jewish Druze. On 20 April leaders of both Druze and Zionist forces met at the Jewish settlement of Kiryat 'Amal. During the meeting Moshe Dayan, then the chief commander of Hagana and who would later become Israel's minister of defense, suggested that the defectors from the Druze battalion could form a pro-Jewish battalion and receive a salary from Jewish funds.<sup>118</sup> As a result the members of the Druze battalion from Syria began abandon the cause. The state of the battalion is reflected in a dispatch sent by Wahhab back to headquarters in Damascus on 3 May in which he claims, "We cannot maintain the situation unless you send reinforcements."<sup>119</sup> While the plan to form a

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<sup>116</sup> Parsons. 65

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. 67

<sup>118</sup> Firro. *The Druzes in the Jewish State*. 50

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. 52



Druze unit to fight alongside Jews was delayed the majority of the Syrian-Druze soldiers had no intention of continuing their military campaign against the Jews.

Aware that greater numbers of Druze were now favoring friendly relations with the Jews the Arab nationalists made a concerted effort to elicit support from the community. Rasul Khatib set up a meeting with Druze leaders Salman Tarif and Salman Khayr in the village of Abu Snan in an effort to convince the Druze to support Qāwuqjī and the ALA. Unable to convince the Druze leadership to join him, Khatib targeted the youth and campaigned for the Arab nationalist cause. Aware of Khatib's efforts Jewish intelligence made the decision to destroy his house later that year in order to send a message to Khatib and other nationalists working with the Druze. These intentions are made clear in a Hagana intelligence dispatch declaring, "It should be hoped that Rasul Khatib will find out that his house was blown up and that he will find a connection between this and his activities among the Druze."<sup>120</sup>

By May 1948 the Druze community had not reached a consensus in regards to their relationship with the nascent state of Israel. The threats that the Jabal al-Druze could join Transjordan surfacing periodically in diplomatic dispatches, the Druze battalion in the ALA, and the Druze who favored Jewish interests all demonstrate the absence of a consistent national affiliation among the community at that time. This also demonstrates that fractures in the national identification of the Druze were beginning to divide the community. The efforts of the Jewish Agency operatives to imagine and invent a new Druze history is evident in the manner in which those operative spoke about the community. Yet with a war brewing questions of loyalty regarding the Druze troubled both Jewish and Arab officials in Israel and Syria.

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<sup>120</sup> Hagana Archives, Intelligence dispatch dated 14 August 1948 quoted in Parsons. *The Druze Between Palestine and Israel*. 89

The Arab nationalist activities in the Druze community were cause for alarm for the Jewish Agency operatives who had been cultivating friendly relations with the community for nearly two decades. The incipient state of Israel entered into negotiations with the Palestinian-Druze about how they could cement the community's loyalty. Many Palestinians including the majority of the Druze heavily relied on the profits of the harvest for their living. The summer harvest became a tool by which Israel could court the Druze.<sup>121</sup> The Israeli Defense Force adopted a policy of harvesting Palestinian crops themselves and destroying those which they were not able to reap, and at the same time attacking the Palestinian *fallāḥīn* who attempted to harvest their crops. This policy forced many Palestinians desperate for food and security to abandon their lands and flee to neighboring Arab states.<sup>122</sup> Israel used this policy to privilege the Palestinian-Druze above other Palestinian-Arabs. Those Druze villages that agreed to continue their policy of neutrality in the conflict were granted access to their fields and even supplied with tools and other necessities to complete the summer harvest. The political calculations of the Israeli authorities fulfilled their purpose.<sup>123</sup> Economic manipulation of the Druze community would quickly become a cornerstone of Israel's policy toward the minority sect.

The harvest policy aided the Israeli authorities greatly in their quest to win the loyalty of the Druze community. A number of Druze villages surrendered to the IDF without a fight and soon after enjoyed harvesting their crops. By the end of the July the issue of Druze soldiers in the IDF was revisited and received with a favored response. By August Israeli officials decided to form a Druze unit under Jewish leadership to fight in the IDF. This initial unit consisted of 211 Syrian-Druze who had defected from Wahhab's unit and some Druze youth from the

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<sup>121</sup> Benny Morris, *1948 and After: Israel and the Palestinians* (London: Oxford, 1990). 173

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.* 182

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.* 187

villages of Daliyat al-Carmel and Isfiya.<sup>124</sup> The important role that the “Minorities Unit” played in the IDF’s military campaign in Galilee helped to legitimize the efforts of those in the young Israeli government who advocated working with the Druze.<sup>125</sup> The success of the “Minorities Unit” led to its expansion and by 1949 there were roughly 400 Druze serving in the IDF. As the Druze were slowly being integrated into the IDF Arab nationalists extended their efforts to convince the Druze to join their cause. Throughout 1948 nationalist leaders actively campaigned for Druze assistance and sent representatives to recruit soldiers in their villages. These attempts yielded few new supporters of the Palestinian cause and the majority of the Palestinian-Druze continued to remain neutral in the conflict.<sup>126</sup>

The Druze motivations for serving in the IDF and the ALA were varied. It appears that the Druze’s decision to join the IDF was a pragmatic one. The Zionist forces were in the ascendant and the Arab forces were increasingly divided. Service in the IDF also included economic benefits for a community that maintained a traditional way of life that was becoming increasingly difficult to continue. The majority of the Druze lived an agrarian lifestyle focused around farming. There was limited access to modern forms of education and therefore little opportunity in choosing a career. Subsistence farming was becoming less and less feasible and military service became a path to economic success.<sup>127</sup> The Druze serving in the IDF were granted economic benefits that extended to their families hence enriching their villages. These benefits included obtaining licenses to transport and sell food, and travel freely throughout the region.<sup>128</sup> Through their control of the harvest and the offer of military service to the Druze, the Israeli authorities had many economic enticements for the Druze community. Building on these

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<sup>124</sup> Gabriel Ben-Dor, *The Druzes in Israel: A Political Study* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1979). 130

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Firro, *The Druzes in the Jewish State*. 66

<sup>127</sup> Ibid. 57

<sup>128</sup> Parsons. 106

economic issues Israeli authorities embarked on a new phase of re-shaping Druze history and creating an invented identity- turning the imagining of the Israeli-Druze into a reality.

The most important *maqām* or shrine for the Druze in Israel lies near the abandoned village of Hittin and is dedicated to al-Nabī Shu‘ayb, the Biblical character Jethro.<sup>129</sup> This shrine became a focal point of the Israeli authorities’ relationship with the Palestinian-Druze. The first Israeli Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, visited the site in his first meeting with the Druze leadership in November 1948. The Israeli Prime Minister used the occasion to emphasize the historical connection that the Druze share with the Jews through al-Nabī Shu‘ayb. In December the shrine was used for a ceremony for new recruits being sworn into the IDF.<sup>130</sup> Following a number of visits to the shrine the Israeli Minister of Religions, Tuvia Cohen, saw the potential al-Nabī Shu‘ayb could have in cultivating an Israeli friendly identity with the Druze. Writing in a report on one of his visits Cohen expressed his interest in the shrine for political purposes.

When dealing with people who live in the Middle East, one should always take into account that there is no difference between religion and politics. Thus it is indispensable to recall that factors of religion can be transformed into extremely valuable factors of politics. Take, for example the shrine of “nabi al-Shu‘ayb,” which is in Israel. This site is most sacred to all Druzes, much like the sanctuary of Mecca for Muslims. This gives Israel an extraordinary tool by which to prove, both religiously and politically, its attitude towards the Druze community, which makes it a primary instrument for propaganda to prepare the ground for potential developments in the near future among the Druzes.<sup>131</sup>

Through 1949 the Israeli authorities gave financial assistance to the custodians of the Shrine, the Tarif family, to restore and promote it. Traditionally pilgrimages to the shrine were low key and attended by few, but the Israeli authorities actively promoted the pilgrimage in 1949

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<sup>129</sup> Ilana Kaufman, "Ethnic Affirmation or Ethnic Manipulation: The Case of the Druze in Israel," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 2004: 53-82. 71

<sup>130</sup> Kais Firro, "Druze Maqamat in Israel: From Ancient to Newly Invented Traditions," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 2005: 217-239. 228

<sup>131</sup> Tuvia Cohen, "Memorandum by Cohen, 10 August 1949," *Israel State Archives FM/2565/8* (August 10, 1949). Quoted in Firro. *The Druzes in the Jewish State*. 95

enlisting Druze recruits in the “Minorities Unit” to publicize it. A parade and feast were held in tandem with the pilgrimage which also was attended by Israeli officials.<sup>132</sup> This newly invented tradition was held annually and always attended by high ranking Israeli officials. Israel’s political use of the shrine was intended to reach not just those within the state’s border but also the Druze in neighboring Lebanon and Syria reflecting the administration’s view of the sect as a single entity.

In 1949, Tuvia Cohen echoed earlier sentiments urging Israeli officials to use their connections within the local Druze community to reach out to the Druze as a whole as a means of solidifying the Jewish state regionally. In the minds of the Druze advocates within the Israeli government the Druze were “a single, separate entity, different from the population among which they live.”<sup>133</sup> The decision makers in Israel saw the community in this manner:

We should see the Druze community in Israel as an integral part of the whole community in the Middle East whose number is about 250,000 souls. Until now there are close relations between Druze communities in Syria, Lebanon and Israel. Frequently common meetings are held between them, especially between religious chiefs, in order to deal with essential problems concerning the whole community, including taking up a common position vis-à-vis new forces acting in the political arena.<sup>134</sup>

In the 1950’s the Palestinian-Druze community was rapidly becoming the Israeli-Druze as their ties relationship with the Jewish Authorities were strengthened. Despite their success with the Israeli-Druze the state’s efforts to invent a parallel Druze identity within the framework of a Jewish state did not reap the same fruit in the greater Druze community. Druze allegiance in Israel heavily relied on economic and political advantages. The history of the Druze as imagined by the Israeli authorities and the accompanying invented traditions that corresponded to this past arguably had less to do with Druze loyalty than the benefits of collaborating with Israelis. Druze leaders like the Tarif family gained power within the Druze circle through the elevation of the al-

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<sup>132</sup> Firro. “Druze Maqamat in Israel”. 229

<sup>133</sup> Ben-Zvi, “The Druze Community in Israel,” *Israel Exploration Journal* IV, no. 2 (1954): 65-76.

<sup>134</sup> Cohen. “Memorandum by Cohen, 10 August 1948.”

Nabī Shu‘ayb shrine and the promotion of its pilgrimage. The other leaders in the Druze community were supported by MAPAI, the leading political party in Israel, and with its help, some politically motivated Druze were able to win seats in the Knesset.<sup>135</sup> Druze cooperation with Israeli authorities also opened economic doors in two sectors of the Israeli economy: the construction industry and the military. While it is difficult to tell how much of an influence the offer of an imagined shared past between the Druze and Jews played in winning Druze sympathies, it is impossible to discount the economic pragmatism involved in the decision of large segment of the Druze community to ally with the new state. By 1956 the Israeli-Druze were well on their way to full integration into the Jewish state as evidenced by the Druze demands that the same conscription laws for Jews be applied to the Druze.<sup>136</sup> Some Israeli-Druze disagreed with this decision but there is little evidence of any large numbers of the community who refused to be considered candidates for military service.

### **State Building in Syria and the Integration of the Druze**

The integration of the Syrian-Druze into the Syrian state was much rockier than that of their coreligionists in Israel. Under the leadership of the Atrash clan the Druze revolted against French rule and liberated the Jabal al-Druze one year before independence in 1946. At the time of independence the Syrian-Druze comprised the most competent military force in Syria leading President Shukrī al-Quwatlī to label them a “dangerous minority.”<sup>137</sup> Threats from Sultan al-Atrash to attack Damascus compelled al-Quwatlī to apologize for his remarks. Attempting to reconcile with the Druze, President al-Quwatlī invited al-Atrash to participate in a parade celebrating Evacuation Day on 17 April 1946. Atrash refused to attend unless al-Quwatlī agreed

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<sup>135</sup> Firro. *The Druzes in the Jewish State*. 109

<sup>136</sup> Ben-Dor. 131

<sup>137</sup> Joshua Landis, "Shishakli and the Druzes: Integration and intransigence," in *The Syrian Land: Processes of Integration and Fragmentation, Bilad al-Sham from the 18th to the 20th Century*, ed. Thomas Phillip and Brigit Schaebler, 369-396 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998).

to recognize him as the most prominent Arab nationalist for his role in the 1925 revolt against the French. This was the first sign that the Druze wanted preferential treatment from the Syrian government.

Amīr Ḥasan al-Aṭrash, the governor of the Jabal al-Druze and a relative of Sultan, pushed President al-Quwatlī to allocate a large portion of the budget for the Jabal al-Druze. Negotiations between Ḥasan al-Aṭrash and the Syrian minister of the interior reveal that he expected increased funding for education and numerous other development projects. Among them was a plan that would create networks of roads connecting all the villages of the Jabal al-Druze with the capital Suwayda.<sup>138</sup> Additionally he wanted a number of government jobs reserved for the Druze. President al-Quwatlī was outraged by the demands of Druze leaders and refused to give into their demands. The failure of the Damascus government to acquiesce to their demands, often prompted the Aṭrashes to threaten that they would secede from Syria and become part of Transjordan.<sup>139</sup> However, British diplomatic cables reveal that this was never a serious option for the Druze.

President al-Quwatlī directed most of the money going to the Jabal al-Druze to destroying the Aṭrash's hold on the province. In 1947 Quwatlī courted and later funded a group of lesser Druze chiefs who were willing to challenge Aṭrashes' control of the Jabal al-Druze.<sup>140</sup> These lesser chiefs organized militias and attempted to intimidate the Aṭrash's and their supporters. British diplomatic cables reveal that a quasi civil war developed in the Jabal al-Druze between the Aṭrash's and the upstart chiefs. The Aṭrashes repeatedly accused the government of intervening in the Jabal al-Druze and attempting to split the community however there was little outside help. By 1949, the Aṭrashes had beaten back the pro-Quwatlī Druze and

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Destani, B. *Minorities in the Middle East: Druze Communities* Vol. 4 p. 257-258, 277.

<sup>140</sup> Landis.

solidified their hold on the province. The Druze dissatisfaction with Damascus continued over the next several years.

The leadership of the Atrashs and their suspicion toward Damascus hampered efforts to convince the Syrian-Druze to relinquish their semi-autonomy in the Jabal al-Druze. Syrian President Adīb al-Shīshaklī was careful not to make the same mistakes as his predecessor in relation to the Druze.<sup>141</sup> When Shīshaklī rose to power through a military coup in 1949, the Jabal al-Druze still maintained a considerable degree of autonomy under the leadership of the Atrash family. Shīshaklī's methods of state-building in some ways mirrored that of the French. As president he used both coercive force and economic development as tools to integrate communities he felt were not committed to the state of Syria.<sup>142</sup> The Syrian-Druze expectations of preferential treatment from Damascus clashed with Shīshaklī's desire to abolish communal identities and replace them with a greater Syrian identity.<sup>143</sup> During the first year of his rule Shīshaklī built up the military in order to enforce his vision of Syria.

Shīshaklī's vision of Syria included a subjugated and integrated Jabal al-Druze. The President was known to say that, "My enemies are like a serpent: the head is the Jabal Druze, the stomach Homs, and the tail Aleppo. If I crush the head the serpent will die."<sup>144</sup> Shīshaklī's focus on "crushing the head of the serpent" involved eliminating the relative economic independence the Jabal al-Druze enjoyed through the smuggling trade, the hashish trade, and occasional financial assistance from King Abdullah. Shīshaklī curtailed the smuggling activities of the Druze by placing his brother in charge of the border police strengthening the security apparatus.

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Conversely the Israeli policy toward the Druze shared greater similarities with the British methods of state building.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid. One of Shishakli's policies outlawed any institutional or cultural display of religious confession in Syria and demanded conformity. This has led some historians to point out that he may have been in denial of the religious and ethnic diversity that existed in the region. The Druze became his most hated enemy.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.



Simultaneously Shīshaklī refused to develop the infrastructure of the Jabal al-Druze limiting the ability of Druze farmers to compete with better developed regions in northern Syria.<sup>145</sup>

Shīshaklī's regime purged the Syrian army of high ranking Druze officers forcing them into retirement and refusing to promote other Druze officers on the rise. The build up of the Syrian army between 1949 and 1951 and the relegation of the Druze to a minor position in the army left Shīshaklī confident that he could use the army to quell any discontent that would arise from the Jabal al-Druze. In the years after 1951 Shishalki's regime targeted the Druze leadership accusing a number of prominent Druze of spying for Israel while waging a propaganda war against the minority community. During this time many Druze leaders were arrested in large numbers and many others fled to Transjordan. The vast majority of Syrians tried for espionage during Shīshaklī's presidency were Druze.

Shīshaklī's policies toward the Jabal al-Druze had developed a strong sense of resentment in the Jabal al-Druze. Many Druze including the sons of Sultan al-Aṭrash joined the opposition Ba'th party and openly campaigned against the central government. In 1953 Shīshaklī crushed a revolt in the Jabal al-Druze and arrested all the traditional Druze leaders again announcing publicly that the Druze were spies and dangerous. Shīshaklī's actions sparked widespread demonstrations in Druze villages throughout Israel demanding an end to the repression of their co-religionists in Syria.<sup>146</sup> Once the threat of an uprising in the Jabal al-Druze subdued Shīshaklī continued his policies that were becoming increasingly unpopular in Syria. On 25 February 1954 a military uprising originally planned by Druze army officers with Ba'th party affiliations in Dayr al-Zur began in northern Syria. By the end of the day Shīshaklī had fled the country.<sup>147</sup> While Shīshaklī and his policies toward the Druze were gone the damage to the community's

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Firro. *The Druze in the Jewish state*. 126

<sup>147</sup> Landis. It is of note that Shishkali was assassinated while in exile in Brazil by a Druze.

political power and autonomy was irreversible.<sup>148</sup> The economy of the Jabal al-Druze was unable to recuperate following the coup and many Druze were forced to search for work throughout Syria more fully integrating the Druze into Syria. Numerous Syrian-Druze leaders continued to exercise significant political influence through their growing relationship with the Ba'th party.<sup>149</sup>

### **Nationalist Imaginings and the Druze in Propaganda**

As it appeared that Druze relations with the Syrian government were improving following the coup in the 1954, a propaganda campaign between Arab nationalists and Zionists for the loyalty of all Druze factions was emerging. The growing relationship between Syrian leadership and the Druze leadership was disconcerting for members of the Israeli administration who had been worried about the influence of a staunchly pro-Syrian Druze community in the Jabal on the Palestinian-Druze.<sup>150</sup> By 1956, pro-Israeli and pro-Syrian pamphlets were being distributed in Druze villages in Israel and the Jabal al-Druze. Both pro-Israeli and pro-Syrian pamphlets urged the Druze to remain loyal to their noble traditions and their past. Of course the rendition of Druze tradition and history varied according to the viewpoints of the differing political tracts.

Toward the end of 1956 copies of a leaflet purportedly from Sultan al-Atrash and two other prominent Syrian-Druze were being circulated around Druze villages in Israel. They were designed to combat the recent decision to make all Druze men eligible for IDF conscription. The arguments in the pamphlet hailed the struggle of the Arab peoples against the “colonialists and

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Itamar Rabinovich, *Syria Under the Ba'th 1963-66* (Jerusalem: Israel University Press, 1972). 11

<sup>150</sup> In the aftermath of the coup, Hasan al-Atrash was wooed by a number of Syrian political parties and was awarded the post of Secretary of Agriculture. Other Druze who ran for office won sweeping victories in the elections following the coup.

Zionists” and accused the Zionists of sowing communal dissention among the Arabs.<sup>151</sup> The message of the pamphlet goes on to attack those Druze who serve in the IDF saying, “Those agents and hirelings in the service of Israel are despised by Israel herself for cooperating with her and for their disloyalty to the Arab cause by volunteering to join her forces to fight their brethren on the Palestine borders.”<sup>152</sup> The pamphlet then urges the Druze to unite with their Arab brothers and oppose the Zionists while giving a few examples of Israel’s lack of respect for the Druze community. The pamphlet closes by praising the proud tradition of the Druze and their place in the struggle against all forms of colonialism:

The allegation that the Druses in Syria are being persecuted is false and is a colonial plot to weaken Druze resistance. The Druze in Syria will always be inflammable material for any Arab revolt against colonialism. It is hoped that this attitude will serve to guide the Israel Druses, who are expected to take a stand compatible with the prestige of all Druses, gained by their struggle against colonialism and Zionism, thus refuting all Israel allegations and deceitful propaganda.<sup>153</sup>

Upon discovering the pamphlets the British Consul in Haifa doubted it was written by Sultan al-Aṭrash. However the pamphlet clearly attempts to paint the Druze as valiant defenders of Arab nationalism and condemn Druze service in the IDF. It also constructs a Druze history that connects the Druze to a larger Arab community. Finally the pamphlet makes no mention of the tremendous persecution of the Druze at the hands of the previous Syrian regime until near the end where it neatly glosses over the treatment of Druze in Syria implicating these allegations as part of a “colonial plot.” News of the pamphlet quickly reached the Israeli authorities and there was a quick and cunning response.

In the early months of 1957 a pamphlet purportedly from the Free Druze Association appeared in villages in northern Israel and the Jabal al-Druze in Syria. According to a British

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<sup>151</sup> Sultan al-Aṭrash, "Leaflet Addressing the Sons of Maruf (Druzes) distributed in Palestine," *Minorities in the Middle East: Druze Communities, 1840-1974*, Vol. 4, ed. Bejtullah Destani (Archive Editions Limited, 2006), 419-420.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

foreign service officers stationed in Haifa the pamphlet was “undoubtedly from Israel and [...] it was dropped from an unidentified plane over the Jebel el Druze and Israel.”<sup>154</sup> The writer of the pamphlet claims to be from Syria and consistently bemoans the troubled situation of the Druze there. The author opens the pamphlet describing the Druze as a peaceful, patriotic, and religious people who are persecuted because of their faith:

We, the Druses, have been subjected in Syria to severe persecution throughout our long history, which is full of persistent struggles for the preservation of our existence and our traditions as a sect, which has its own particular traditions, but this did not suit the non-Druze sects. We wished to live with them in peace and tranquility but they denied us this. We are all the time defenders of independence and the first to respond to the country's call but in spite of that we have suffered in our homes at the hands of our countrymen.<sup>155</sup>

The author then continues to praise the role of the Druze in the Syrian revolution and in throwing off the shackles of colonialism. He then lists the Syrian government's crimes against the Druze community; among them are incarceration, torture, and the death penalty against their leaders. He goes on to imply that the Syrian government has some enmity against the Druze accusing the government of levying prison sentences against the Druze in both Lebanon and Israel.<sup>156</sup> The author also constantly alludes to the Druze's persecution that characterized their past and presents it as naturally following from the intolerance of their Muslim neighbors. After detailing all of the Syrian regime's crimes against the Druze the author closes by praising the Druze's militant past declaring, “We have gained in our history a glory which frightens our enemies, although we are few, as they claim.”<sup>157</sup>

The exact source of this pamphlet is unknown, however the ability to fly a plane over both Syrian and Israeli airspace and drop these pamphlets without being shot down points to

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<sup>154</sup> N.O.W. Steward, "Report from Steward, British Consul in Haifa to Francis Rundall British Embassy in Tel-Aviv, 3 May 1957," *Minorities in the Middle East: Druze Communities, 1840-1974*, Vol. 4, ed. Bejtullah Destani (Archive Editions Limited, 2006), 421-422.

<sup>155</sup> The Free Druze Organization, "Pamphlet to Druze in Syria and Israel, 1957," *Minorities in the Middle East: Druze Communities, 1840-1974*, Vol. 4, ed. Bejtullah Destani (Archive Editions Limited, 2006), 423-425.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid. 424

<sup>157</sup> Ibid. 425

Israeli involvement. The author is clearly not a Syrian-Druze, since at the time in which the pamphlet was written and distributed the Syrian government's persecution of the Druze minority had come to a halt. The pamphlet's aim appears to be to emphasize the peculiar nature of the Druze sect and the importance of communal identity while contrasting that identity against the Arab nation. The author refers many times to the patriotic history of the Druze and their willingness to fight for their country. Finally, it appears that the pamphlet was an appeal for Syrian-Druze to rise up against the government.

The rising popularity of the new face of Arab nationalism, Gamāl 'Abd al-Nāṣir, was again cause for concern for the Israeli administration and in July, 1958 a pamphlet titled, "An Appeal to Druses" coming from Ben-Ami Gourevitch, president of a Zionist organization, was distributed to the Druze in Lebanon, Syria, and Israel. This pamphlet appeared in the wake of Nāṣir's successful formation of the United Arab Republic which united Syria and Egypt. What was even more disconcerting for the Israeli leadership was that prominent Lebanese Druze leader Kamāl Junbalāṭ publicly supported the union advocating Arab nationalism in Lebanon. Fears that Lebanese and Syrian Druze sentiment could spill over into the Israeli-Druze communities prompted Gourevitch to paint Nāṣir as a very dangerous person saying that he wanted to, "annihilate the Druze" after he got rid of the Jews and the Maronites.<sup>158</sup> Gourevitch then urges the Druze to emulate their great historical leader Fakhr al-Din and rise up against Nāṣir and the Arabs. Throughout the short tract he continually differentiates the Druze from the Arabs and even asserts that the Druze currently "suffer under the Arab yoke." The pamphlet encourages the Druze in Syria to assert their autonomy in the Jabal al-Druze. In closing Gourevitch ties the fates of the Druze to Israel and asserts that together they can defeat the danger that is Nāṣir

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<sup>158</sup> Ben-Ami Gourevitch, "Pamphlet: An Appeal to the Druzes, 11 July 1958," *Minorities in the Middle East: Druze Communities, 1840-1974*, Vol. 4, ed. Bejtullah Destani (Archive Editions Limited, 2006), 427.

exclaiming, “long live the state of Israel, long live a free and united Lebanon, and long live a Druze state in Djebel al-Druze.”<sup>159</sup>

There is a common theme in both these tracts which is the oppression of the Druze and the glorification of their history. Both the Arab nationalists and the Zionists constantly refer to the Druze as being victims of the oppression of the other. The Arab nationalists constantly refer to the Zionists as a form of colonialism that seeks to undermine the Druze’s glorious history and exploit them. Conversely the Zionists insist that the Druze are not entirely Arab and like their Jewish allies have always been persecuted by their Arab neighbors. Thus the Druze and the Jews share a past and likely a common destiny. The propaganda battle continued to be waged for the hearts and minds of the Druze by the Arab nationalists and the Israelis. These propaganda wars gave the Druze two “imagined histories” with corresponding communities to which they could adhere. Meanwhile economic interests were slowly pulling the members of the Druze communities into the orbits of these “imagined identities” as either Israelis or Syrians.

### **Economics and Integration**

In Israel the traditional economic interests of the Druze community were tied to the land on which they lived.<sup>160</sup> By the mid-1950s the state of Israel had established itself and begun a series of land reform policies that slowly stripped the indigenous Arab population (this includes the Druze) of large chunks of land. Over the next decade land expropriation policies methodically and systematically confiscated Druze lands undermining their traditional agrarian lifestyle. Despite attempts to resist these land policies the encroaching state powers were

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Firro. *The Druzes in the Jewish State*. 87

unyielding.<sup>161</sup> As the Druze lost their farmland they also lost their ability to compete with the emerging Jewish farms. State policies favored farms run by Jews setting prices that pushed many Arab and Druze farmers out of business.<sup>162</sup> In the words of an Israeli-Druze scholar, “It signaled the onset of a process that in the early 1950s was to alienate the Druzes from agriculture on which the community had thrived traditionally and steer them into a direction that would make them ever more dependent on the dominant economy of the Jewish state.”<sup>163</sup>

While the Israeli-Druze were slowly losing land the state of Israel was undertaking massive development projects, creating a need for manual labor that could attract the Druze who were not serving in the military. Work in the private sector and service in the armed forces brought the Druze in greater contact with Jewish citizens of the state and personal relations were being formed between the two communities. The difficulty of finding work in their home villages pushed the Druze to rely heavily on the state for employment either through military service or state projects. Dependence on the state for work limited the ability of the Israeli-Druze to outwardly resist state imposed identities. Although Arab nationalist movements arose within the Israeli-Druze community they were often undermined by Druze Knesset members who benefitted from their connections to the ruling MAPAI party.<sup>164</sup>

A similar process with the Druze was occurring in Syria. After Shishakli’s dismantling of the Jabal al-Druze’s economy, service in the military became an expedient means of providing for oneself. The rise of the Ba’th party in the 1950’s and the tightening of their grip on the country after the dissolution of the UAR in 1961 benefitted the Druze greatly. During these

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<sup>161</sup> In the 1960’s gangs of Druze youth attempted to physically bar Jewish workers from working on the confiscated lands. In the end the state gained full control of the lands and the gangs were forced find work else where.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid. 147

<sup>163</sup> Firro. 87

<sup>164</sup> Ibid. 175

years the ranks of the Ba'th party became swollen with minorities such as the Druze and the 'Alawites.<sup>165</sup> The Druze proximity to power through their growing ranks in the military gave them a greater stake in the fate of the country. A Syrian-Druze identity was in full development by the mid-1960's with a new war just on the horizon.

As the nation-states of Syria and Israel emerged in the aftermath of World War II the Druze became a coveted ally of both Arab nationalists and Zionists. The Druze tradition of confessional autonomy clashed with invitations to openly ally themselves with either side and instead the Druze opted for neutrality. While both Israel and Arab nationalists have engaged in imagining identities for the Druze, neither have been entirely successful and these imagined identities have been challenged by both Arabs and Zionists in reaction to each other. While Israel has attempted to create an identity that separates the Druze from their Arab heritage and emphasizes a shared heritage with the Jews, the Arab nationalists have depicted the Druze as valiant defenders of the Arab nation and Arabs. The economic integration of both Israeli-Druze and Syrian-Druze has as a result increased interaction between the Druze and the national society in which they live. This, in turn, has increased their exposure to new national identities that have subsequently been embraced, or so it seems, by the two communities. As Israel failed to keep its promises to the Druze community, the Arab nationalist began to gain greater support within the community. Education would become the next battleground in the struggle for the Druze community.

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<sup>165</sup> Rabinovich. 115



## In the Classroom: Intellectuals and the Identity Debate

The foundation upon which the Israeli government built its relationship with the Druze community showed signs of crumbling throughout the 1960's and 1970's as promises to the community remained unfulfilled and Arab nationalists persisted in their attempts to undermine Israeli efforts to create an imagined history of the Israeli-Druze. In 1967, the Israeli authorities embarked on a new campaign to win the support of four more Druze villages following the take over of the Golan Heights despite a coalescing resistance to Israel's Druze policies in the Galilee. Unwilling to accommodate the growing demands of the Israeli-Druze community the state embarked on a campaign to reform Druze education to inculcate the next generation of Druze with a love of Israel and a sense of patriotic duty.<sup>166</sup> This chapter will discuss the success and failures of Israel's attempts to manipulate Druze identity through the education system while simultaneously attempting to integrate the four Druze villages of the Golan Heights into the state.

### **Resistance and the Formation of the Israeli-Druze Intelligentsia**

By the 1960's the Israeli government's efforts to separate the Druze from the Arab community had proved mostly superficial and ineffective. The establishment of the Druze religious courts and the conscription of all Druze males into the IDF were exceptions to how the government chose to deal with the Israeli-Druze community.<sup>167</sup> The vast majority of Druze affairs were handled in the same manner as those of Muslim and Christian Arabs. After 1948 the Israeli government treated the Druze as more of "a less persecuted minority" rather than a

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<sup>166</sup> Deborah Court and Randa Abbas, "Role of Druze High Schools in Shaping Students Identity and Citizenship," *Education, Citizenship, and Social Justice*, 2010: 145-162.

<sup>167</sup> Firro. *The Druzes in the Jewish State*. 167

partner in building the new state.<sup>168</sup> The failure of Israeli authorities to address the predicament of the Druze community led some within the community to sympathize with and embrace elements of the Arab nationalist movement and to oppose Israel's Druze narrative. Educated alongside Arab Christians and the Muslims, many Druze became better acquainted with the tenets of Arab nationalist ideology through their experience in the school system.

The Israeli-Druze community benefited greatly in the first decade of Israel's rule as access to education improved with the expansion of the state. The Israeli authorities made primary education compulsory and strongly encouraged the Druze to attend through high school. As a result literacy rates in Druze villages increased greatly. According to the 1961 census only fifty percent of Druze were literate, however the literacy rate for those aged nineteen or younger was ninety-two percent.<sup>169</sup> The increase in literacy enabled many within the community to expand their political views beyond the narrative of the village elders aligned with the state. As a result the numbers of Israeli-Druze participating in debates on the role of the community in Israel began to grow. The gradual formation of a young Druze intelligentsia challenged the traditional Druze leadership and their ties to the state. In the early years of the state the Druze education was overseen by the ministry of minorities. The Druze attended school with and were exposed to the curriculum designed for Circassians, Arab Christians, and Arab Muslims. These schools were typically dominated by Arab teachers who often espoused Arab nationalism and other leftist ideologies. Arab nationalism was often disseminated in some form in the classroom despite not being apart of the officially sanctioned curriculum.<sup>170</sup> Support for Arab nationalism

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<sup>168</sup> Iman A. Hamdy, "The Druze in Israel: A Less Persecuted Minority?," *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, July 2008: 407-416. 412

<sup>169</sup> Ben-Dor. 115

<sup>170</sup> Ibid. 119

and resistance to Israel's policies toward the Druze community increased among the young and educated Druze.

The Druze intelligentsia adopted political stances left to those of the village sheikhs and often challenged their authority. Samīh al-Qāsim, the Druze intellectual and poet, made news in July 1960 when Israeli authorities arrested him for refusing to enlist in the IDF. In response a series of articles emphasizing the history of conflict between Druze and Arab Christians appeared in the government run *al-Yūm*.<sup>171</sup> The intelligentsia challenged the basis of these articles and accused Israelis of trying to drive a wedge between the Druze and the Arabs.<sup>172</sup> The next year a number of Druze intellectuals established *Munaẓamat al-Shābāb al-Durūz* (The Druze Youth Organization). The leadership of the Druze Youth Organization criticized Israeli efforts to separate the Druze from the Arabs and promoted the Arab character of the Druze. The views echoed those of the powerful Lebanese-Druze leader Kamāl Junbalāṭ who established himself as arguably the most politically influential Druze in the fifties and sixties.<sup>173</sup> The organization also sought to wrest control of the community from the tribal leaders who were complicit in the state's policies regarding the Druze. Students and educated Druze formed the foundation of the Druze Youth Organization's support but despite the grievances of the community the organization was never able to garner much support beyond its small base.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> The choice of Christians was possibly due to the secular nationalism that was advocated by many Arab Christians. Additionally the Druze village of Shaḥ'amr was home to Christian population that had traditionally lived in coexistence with their Druze neighbors. At the very least it was an attempt to prevent Arab unity

<sup>172</sup> Firro. *The Druzes in the Jewish State*. 171

<sup>173</sup> Kamāl Junbalāṭ was an ardent Arab nationalist during this time supporting the formation of the United Arab Republic and Egypt's attacks on Israel. He founded the Popular Socialist Front and supported a variety of other leftist movements throughout the Arab World. He also was allied briefly with the PLO during the Lebanese civil war. He was likely one of the primary influences among the pro-Arab Druze in Israel. Kamāl's son and political successor Walīd openly condemned Druze service in the IDF and urged Israeli-Druze who are forced to serve to avoid the front lines.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid. 178

By the 1960's the Druze sheikhs who had collaborated with the state and distanced themselves from the Israeli-Arab community exercised a significant amount of political power in the state. The Druze Youth Organization had never seriously threatened to unseat the entrenched pro-Israeli leadership of the Druze community but its activity had caught their attention. Toward the end of the 1960's the pro-Israel faction of the Druze community began calling for reform in the education system. These requests initially involved replacing Arab Christian and Arab Muslim teachers with Druze teachers in schools with large Druze populations and later led to demands for their own school system. Before the state could act on these demands the Israeli government brought a new community of Druze under their authority with the occupation of the Golan Heights following the 1967 war.

### **The 1967 War and the Creation of the Golan-Druze**

Arab nationalist rhetoric and Israel's aggressive and at times offensive defense of their borders inched the region ever closer to conflict in the 1960's and in June 1967 war erupted between the Jewish state and her Arab neighbors. During the brief conflict the more hawkish leaders within the Israeli government pushed for the capture of the head waters of the Jordan River in the Golan Heights. Among them was general Yigal Allon, who believed that seizing the Golan Heights would facilitate the unification of the Druze in Israel with those in the Jabal al-Druze and thus empower the Druze-Israel alliance while undermining the Arabs strength.<sup>175</sup> By the late 1960's the Israeli-Druze leadership had sided politically with some of the hawkish establishment in the Israeli government. These leaders supported Allon's plan like the Druze Knesset member Sheikh Jabir Mu'adī who claimed the Druze in the Golan were mistreated by

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<sup>175</sup> Eyal Zisser, "June 1967: Israel's Capture of the Golan Heights," *Foreign Relations*, 2002: 168-194. 21

Arab Muslims and welcomed the Jews.<sup>176</sup> Under pressures from politicians and settlers alike Minister of Defense Moshe Dayan reluctantly ordered the final assault that would solidify Israel's hold on the Golan Heights following the conflict.<sup>177</sup>

During the military campaign in the Golan the IDF focused their attacks on Muslim villages and towns near al-Qunītra. By the end of the six day conflict approximately ninety percent of the 130,000 Syrian inhabitants of the Golan Heights had either fled or been expelled.<sup>178</sup> The roughly 7,000 inhabitants that remained in the Golan lived in six villages that had been spared of the violence that ravaged the region. Of the six villages that remained intact following the conflict Majdal Shams, Mas'ada, Buq'atā, 'Eīn Qinya were inhabited by Druze, Ghajar<sup>179</sup> was inhabited by 'Alawis, and finally Sukhatah whose population was also Druze but was later evacuated and destroyed in order to build a military base in its place.<sup>180</sup> In the months after the capture of the Golan Heights the Druze figured prominently in discussions about the future of the newly acquired territory.<sup>181</sup>

In August, Yigal Allon put forward a plan to use Druze from the Golan Heights to foment a rebellion in the Jabal al-Druze with the aim of creating an independent Druze state "that would maintain an economic, military, and diplomatic alliance with Israel."<sup>182</sup> Allon's plan was based on two assumptions: 1) the Druze wanted an independent autonomous state, 2) the Syrian-Druze

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<sup>176</sup> David Larsen, "Arab Sect Wanted Israel to take More Land in War," *The Washington Post*, December 31, 1967: A9.

<sup>177</sup> Zisser. 3

<sup>178</sup> Jonathan Molony, Michelle Stewart and Nancy Tuohy-Hamill, *From Settlement to Shelf: The Economic Occupation of the Syrian Golan* (Majdal Shams: Al-Marsad, 2009). 17

<sup>179</sup> Ghajar's isolated location adjacent to the Lebanese border and small population served little strategic value that could have justified attacking it. Consequently the village is now disputed by Israeli and Lebanese authorities and the inhabitants are able to move in between Israel and Lebanon with relative ease.

<sup>180</sup> The inhabitants of the village were evacuated to Mas'ada which is also inhabited by Druze. There is very little mention of the village in the sources and it was relatively isolated from the other four Druze villages of the Golan. Molony, Stewart, and Tuohy-Hamill. 17

<sup>181</sup> James Feron, "Occupied Syrian Heights Now Stilled," *The New York Times*, August 7, 1967: 1.

<sup>182</sup> Akiva Eldar, "A Matter of a Few Dozen Meters," *Haaretz*, June 1, 2008.

wished to politically ally themselves with Israel against the neighboring Arab states. Defense Minister Moshe Dayan categorically rejected Allon's<sup>183</sup> plan hinting that peace with Syria could possibly be gained through negotiations on the issue of returning portions of the Golan Heights.<sup>184</sup> Many Israelis who like Allon, expected to be greeted warmly by "liberated" Syrian-Druze were met with indifference from the community. Contrary to some Israeli narratives, which mistake the lack of overt resistance to the Israeli occupation of the Golan for a Syrian-Druze desire to adopt a position similar to their coreligionists in Israel, the Golan-community was generally not pleased with their current predicament.<sup>185</sup> Syrian-Druze dissent, while passive, began soon after the occupation began and characterized the relations of the community with Israel in the 1970's.

After the 1967 war the Israeli authorities put the Golan Heights under the supervision of the IDF and in the early years of the occupation all Syrian institutions were either eliminated or replaced by Israeli ones. The military administrators of the Golan Heights quickly transformed the education system into a tool of the state outlawing the Syrian curriculum and replacing it with the curriculum taught in Israeli-Arab schools.<sup>186</sup> They also fired the previous teachers at these schools and replaced them with soldiers and sometimes even other high school students in an attempt to stifle any pro-Syrian sentiment.<sup>187</sup> In response to these measures many of the older

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> James Feron, "Strange Case of the 'Forgotten Border'," *The New York Times*, December 24, 1967: 4E.

<sup>185</sup> Israeli scholar Shmuel Shamai contends that initially the majority Druze inhabitants were pleased with Israeli military rule and actively sought to obtain Israeli citizenship. This relationship remained in place until a disagreement arose between Druze Sheikhs and the administrators of military rule. The relationship further deteriorated when a number of Druze leaders were arrested and the Israel began taking steps to formally annex the Golan Heights. While there was little overt resistance to the military authorities there also does not appear to be much support for it either. For more see Shamai, "Critical Sociology of Education Theory in Practice: The Druze Education in the Golan," *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 1990: 449-463.

<sup>186</sup> Bashar Tarabieh, "Education, Control, and Resistance in the Golan Heights," *Middle East Report*, August 1995: 43-47. 44

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

students refused to attend the Israeli run schools and never resumed their education following the occupation.<sup>188</sup> The uncooperative behavior of the Druze in the Golan clashed with that of the leadership of the Druze in Israel and prompted Arab nationalist elements to seek their support.

In the early months of 1968 reports were already beginning to appear of Arab nationalist activities in the Golan Heights. The Palestinian organization Fatah began distributing pamphlets denouncing “Israel’s propaganda” campaign and accusing Israel of violent offenses against the Druze.<sup>189</sup> While Jewish settlers began making their claims on the Golan Heights and military rule stripped the Syrian-Druze of the Golan of their claims to the land Arab nationalist sympathies were on the rise among the Druze in both Israel and the Golan. By 1969 Druze support for RAKAH, the communist party in Israel which advocated a number of Arab nationalist ideas, had grown to over ten percent of the Druze voting population.<sup>190</sup> The following year, the death of Egyptian president and prominent Arab nationalist, Gamāl ‘abd al-Nāṣir, prompted widespread demonstrations against Israel’s occupation of the Golan Heights by the Druze community there. Many Druze high school students figured prominently in the demonstrations leading the military government to question the curriculum being used in the schools there. Following the demonstrations the military administrators of the Golan responded by arresting a host of Druze and firing teachers in the local schools.<sup>191</sup> As Israel’s occupation of the Golan Heights persisted the Druze’s resistance began to take more overt forms.

The loyalty of the Golan-Druze to Syria and the expression of their Arab identity went beyond simple demonstrations. While the Druze in the Golan accepted employment building

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Joe Alex Morris Jr, "Both Seek Druze Loyalty," *The Washington Post*, April 20, 1968: B4.

<sup>190</sup> Firro. *The Druze in the Jewish State*. 197

<sup>191</sup> Tarabieh. 44

Israeli settlements and other Israeli enterprises<sup>192</sup> many of them maintained connections with the Syrian government. In the early seventies the Golan Druze leader Kamal Kanj, who had been targeted by Israel as a potential ally, was convicted of spying on behalf of Syria.<sup>193</sup> Soon after his conviction Shin Bet, the intelligence wing of the IDF, arrested a large number of Druze for their involvement in an underground spy ring associated with the Communist party that was passing information to Syrian officials.<sup>194</sup> Fifteen of these spies were teachers and students again signaling the failure of the educational system to create a pro-Israeli identity among the Druze community.<sup>195</sup> Soon there after Shin Bet uncovered another underground Druze spy network connected with Syria led by Sheikh Abu Jamal in the Golan Heights.<sup>196</sup> Despite these events the Israeli government still valued an alliance with the Druze and continued their campaign to co-opt the community.

Israeli and Syrian efforts to maintain Druze loyalty spilled over into the 1973 war. At the outset of the war Israel began to broadcast news decrying Syria's treatment of the Druze community charging Syria with the execution of a Druze soldier for negligent duty. Syria denied the charges, claiming the soldier had died in battle with the Israelis. The regime went further inviting a local Druze leader to speak on the radio and criminalizing the sharing of 'Israeli rumors'.<sup>197</sup> Caught in the crossfire between the two warring powers the Druze community of the Golan rejected the use of force to return their villages to Syria and instead opted for quietist stance during the conflict.<sup>198</sup> However, Israel's ability to demonstrate their military superiority and maintain control over the Golan Heights did little to influence the Druze there to change

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<sup>192</sup> James Feron, "Golan Ski Resort a Private Business," *The New York Times*, April 25, 1969: 2.

<sup>193</sup> Eldar.

<sup>194</sup> Terrance Smith, "It Can't Happen Here- But it Did," *The New York Times*, December 17, 1972: E5.

<sup>195</sup> Tarabieh. 44

<sup>196</sup> The New York Times, "Arab Convicted in Israel as Spy," *The New York Times*, April 16, 1973: 21.

<sup>197</sup> Scot MacDonald, *Propaganda and Information Warfare in the Twenty-First Century: Altered Images and Deception Operations* (New York: Routledge, 2007). 68

<sup>198</sup> Henry Kamm, "War Passes Through a Town in Syria," *The New York Times*, 1973 йил 15-October: 89.



their loyalties. In the years after 1973 their pro-Syrian spy rings continued to operate among the inhabitants of the Golan pushing Israel to address these issues in a different manner.<sup>199</sup>

### **Inculcating Druze Identity**

Following 1973, the pro-Israel factions of the Druze community and their allies in the government mounted a campaign to reform Druze education, which had continued to be lumped in with Arab education. Although increasing the number of Druze teachers in schools with a large Druze population had been undertaken in the 1969 there had been very little effort to formalize an Israeli-Druze curriculum.<sup>200</sup> In 1974 a number of Druze intellectuals protested the use of the shrine of Nabi Shu'ayb for political purposes and publicly denounced Yitzak Rabin's presence at the shrine during a Druze celebration of Nabi Shu'ayb. The public rejection of the Israeli narrative of Druze history by segments of the Druze community was cause for alarm in both Druze and Israeli circles. This event created a sense of urgency among the pro-Israeli Druze and their calls for education reform intensified. Proponents of an Israeli-Druze school system blamed Arab influences in Druze education for the lack of a clear national identity. Israeli Professor Gabriel Ben-Dor was among those pushing for the creation of a new Israeli-Druze curriculum. He saw the lack of such curriculum as a key factor "relating to identity, citizenship, religion, and language."<sup>201</sup> Ben-Dor headed a committee to investigate and recommend how the Druze could be better integrated into the state to the Knesset. His committee reported that the Arab education system does "little to educate and inculcate the

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<sup>199</sup> The Washington Post, "Israeli Police Say Syrians Have Spies in the Golan Heights," *The Washington Post*, June 1, 1977: A8.

<sup>200</sup> Ben-Dor. 118

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

Druze youth with Israeli-Druze consciousness. This has done damage to the state and its image.”<sup>202</sup> He later recommended,

[a] curriculum with special Druze features should be introduced soon into the Druze schools. With such a curriculum in place, it may be expected that part of the identity problem and, probably also, part of the feeling of frustration that stems from a the lack of clarity in issues relating to identity will be solved. Thus the committee recommends to introduce this curriculum as soon as possible.<sup>203</sup>

By 1975 the Knesset had approved the creation of an Israeli-Druze curriculum with a special emphasis on “preparing Druze youth for military service in the IDF, strengthen the teaching of civics, Israeli consciousness and strengthen their Druze consciousness in the Druze and Hebrew schools.”<sup>204</sup> Many aspects of the new Druze curriculum promoted the history and traditions that had been invented and imagined in the early years of Druze-Jewish relationship. Using selected elements of Druze folklore, traditions, history, festivals, etc. the new curriculum attempted to clarify Druze identity in terms that benefited the Jewish state.<sup>205</sup> Confident of their ability to reshape Druze identity the Israeli authorities emphasized the importance of a Druze shrine in the Golan Heights with the hopes of gaining the support of the community there.<sup>206</sup> As word of the development of the special Druze curriculum spread, an opposition formed.

The pro-Arab elements of the Israeli-Druze community combined forces with the *‘uqqal*, who feared the revelation of sacred Druze teachings to outsiders, to voice their opposition to the teaching of Druze heritage in schools.<sup>207</sup> The pro-Arab Druze helped perpetuate such fears knowing that the *‘uqqal*’s resistance to the new curriculum would impede its implementation and

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<sup>202</sup> Knesset Report “The Development of Education in the Druze Community in Israel 1948-1969 *quoted in* Firro. *The Druzes in the Jewish State*. 227

<sup>203</sup> Ben-Dor Report. p 22 *quoted in* Firro. *The Druzes in the Jewish State*. 228

<sup>204</sup> State Archives 13012/1352/1/CL, Eli’ad Peled to the Directors of the Districts, Sections and Branches in the Ministry, 31 December 1974. *Quoted in* Firro. *The Druzes in the Jewish State*. 229

<sup>205</sup> Hamdy. 410

<sup>206</sup> Firro. *The Druzes in the Jewish State*. 230

<sup>207</sup> As mentioned in Chapter one, the Druze faith is based on esotericism and the Druze are not supposed to share their religious beliefs with outsiders. Access to scripture and certain Druze teaching are even limited within the faith. Only those who show a significant level of devotion are initiated into this inner-circle.

weaken the pro-Israel community's political power. In the face of mounting opposition the pro-Israel elements of the Druze community and their supporters in the government continued to push for the development and establishment of the new curriculum. Convinced that the Druze were in the midst of an identity crisis due in part to their education alongside Arabs the government ignored the concerns of the *'uqqal* and created the Druze and Circassian Education and Culture Department in 1978.<sup>208</sup> The education of the Druze was segregated from the Arab population with hopes of fostering a pro-Israeli consciousness and integrating the minority into Israeli society. The goals of the formation of the Druze education systems are clear and reinforce the notion of the Druze as unique; this is demonstrated in the words of the superintendent of Druze education.

Our aim is to educate towards deepening the roots of Druze belonging and love of the Other based on the principle of 'protecting brethren'. We strive to educate our pupils to be proud of their belonging to the Druze ethnic group and to the State of Israel, such that they will be able to declare their belonging overtly in a strong voice and take pride in their belonging ... We also teach Druze uniqueness, Druze history and heritage. If we deserve rights identical to those of the Jewish sector then it is our right to be responsible for the system whose aim it is to cultivate the Druze sector and to emphasize Druze uniqueness. I do not expect another sector to stand up for our rights and cultivate our history and heritage. We want to shape individuals who can contend with the post modern age, provided they do not forget their roots and values ... we aim to build a healthy, moral, achievement oriented and educated Druze society. This is my personal vision as well, and I guide the school principals as much as I can in this direction, so that pupils maintain Druze identity and deal with modern society, while maintaining their roots and values.<sup>209</sup>

The history of Druze military service and their continued military service in the IDF is at the center of the curriculum's aims to inculcate both ideas of citizenship and love of Israel. The special *Shelach* unit is taught by IDF soldiers and is meant to prepare Druze students for service in the military.<sup>210</sup> This curriculum glorifies the military legacy of the Druze and their connections with Israel. One instructor of the *Shelach* unit described his purpose as to

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<sup>208</sup> Tamar Almog, "Education in The Druze Community," *People Israel*, April 21, 2008, <http://www.peopleil.org/detailsEn.aspx?itemID=7674&sLanguage=en-US> (accessed April 15, 2012).

<sup>209</sup> Court and Abbas. 150

<sup>210</sup> Almog.

“strengthen pupils Israeli identity and Druze pride.”<sup>211</sup> The Druze curriculum connected what it means to be a Druze to service in the IDF by focusing on the recent history of the Israeli-Druze and glossing over historical Druze figures like Sulṭān al-Aṭrash who were defined by their rebellion against the state. The new Druze curriculum was built on a fabricated narrative of history intended to reinforce an Israeli-Druze identity.

Another keystone of this curriculum is that loyalty to the state in which one lives has historically been a Druze value.<sup>212</sup> This invented tenet of the Druze faith ignores a history of Druze autonomy and rebellion against forces that attempted to breach this autonomy. The Druze rebellions against the Turks, French, and later Syrians are not mentioned. Instead the curriculum defines being Druze as being a good, loyal citizen to the state without challenging the state’s narrative. This sentiment is reflected in the words of a Druze student when questioned about his identity. “I was born a Druze, I was educated as a Druze, and I’m loyal to my country because I am a Druze.”<sup>213</sup> This invented heritage serves Israel and its narrative while also reinforcing the Druze with a sense of belonging and identity. Issues of identity are glossed over or swept under the rug. The following quote from an official from the Druze Education Department brushes off the concerns of some that the Druze curriculum does not address the complexity of Israeli-Druze identity and instead asserts that the real identity crisis exists among the Arab population.

All individuals in the Druze sector, irrespective of age or residential area, define themselves as Israeli Druze that must fulfill all their duties to the State in order to receive their rights. Israeli identity is an integral part of Druze personal identity. This identity essentially means contributing to the State and being an integral part of it, cultivating and caring for the State in the full sense of the word. These activities reinforce Druze identity *and* Israeli identity. If I do not believe in the State and do not want to recognize the State, then there is no room for identity. I as supervisor want to address issues related to our mother tongue, Arabic, and also to the roots of our culture, which is an Arab culture. After all language and culture are important elements shaping identity. The Druze individual can identify in three ways: I am a Druze – I was born to a Druze family and when I die I will be reincarnated as a Druze; I am

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<sup>211</sup> Court and Abbas. 154

<sup>212</sup> Almog.

<sup>213</sup> Court and Abbas. 155

an Israeli – I live in the State of Israel, I am an integral part of it, this is my country; I am an Arab – because of my language and culture. Most young people, adults and the elderly define themselves as Israeli Druze and have complete freedom to choose their identify. There is no conflict here. There is a clear identity that is a source of pride. For us, the Druze, our situation is relatively simple compared to the other Israeli population sectors. The Jews have identity dilemmas, and the Christians also cannot decide to whom to belong and how to identify themselves. For example, a prominent religious leader from the Christian sector expressed concern about radical Islam and fear of identifying himself as an Arab so as not to place Christians and radical Islam in the same category.<sup>214</sup>

Contradictions and concerns over an Israeli-Druze identity arose among students despite the curriculum and its proponents' insistence that there was no contradiction. Institutional and personal discrimination undermined the narrative of the Druze as partners in the Jewish state. Funding for education in Druze villages consistently lagged behind funding for education in Jewish settlements. Additionally, there is a widespread belief among the Druze that they are discriminated against by other Israelis, who often mistake them for Arab Christians or Arab Muslims.<sup>215</sup> An instructor of the *Shelach* curriculum in one Druze school discussed the issue of Druze identity and institutional discrimination.

Reality is scary. We educate the pupils to love their country, contribute to the country, but the State does not fully compensate those that invest efforts on its behalf. Eventually, this may lead to hatred towards the State and violence in society. I am very concerned about the situation. Although the numbers are very small, this sentiment may expand if policy towards the Druze ethnic group does not change. Unfortunately, there is a conflict among the youth about the definition of their identity. A few of the pupils I encounter experience a conflict and ask why they should serve in the army, after all look at the other minorities – they do not serve and do nothing for the country, but nevertheless are granted all the rights – while I serve in the army for three years the Moslems and Christians complete their undergraduate studies and begin working. I may be unemployed after my military service. What am I supposed to say to these pupils about such a conflict? I think that the State must understand the situation and address it. Otherwise, the situation will deteriorate. Once again, I am saying that these are the arguments of only a small share of the pupils, but nonetheless they exist and may expand if the situation does not change.<sup>216</sup>

Despite an emerging identity crisis in the Israeli-Druze community the vast majority of them continued to assert their Israeli-Druze identity and serve loyally in the military and other state institutions. The Israeli-Druze community's acceptance of the state narrative of their

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid. 155

<sup>215</sup> Druze Student from Majdal Shams, interview by Daniel Stoker, (March 26, 2012). Court and Abbas. 161

<sup>216</sup> Court and Abbas. 156

history meant that this narrative was reinforced both in public, through schools and military service and in the home. Despite the persistence of varying degrees of discrimination against the Israeli-Druze, they rarely openly resist state policies. This is not to say that there have not been bouts of protest against the state, but they are rare and generally tame. Due to a number of differences in relations with the Golan-Druze, among them military service, the implementation and response to the new Druze curriculum was much different there.

The goals of this new curriculum conflicted with the views of the Golan-Druze and as it was being formed they sought to maintain ties with Syria. Both the Syrian and Golan Druze petitioned the Israeli authorities with the assistance of the International Red Cross to allow Druze from the Golan to undertake their university education in Syria. Due to the poor quality of secondary education under the military administration and the lack of contact with Jews in the Golan many Druze students in the Golan were not literate in Hebrew or able to qualify for study in Israeli universities.<sup>217</sup> Conversely, Syria still considered the Druze in the Golan Heights citizens and offered them a free university education in Syria. Israel's occupation of the Golan Heights remained the only obstacle to a university education for many of the Druze there. Hoping to improve their relations with the Golan-Druze the Israeli government agreed to allow fifteen residents of the Golan to study in Syria provided that the military administration be allowed to choose them.<sup>218</sup> Even as the Israeli government was allowing a small number of Druze to study in Damascus each year authorities demanded strict control over all aspects of Druze education in the Golan in order to limit dissent.

Implementing the Israeli-Druze curriculum in the Golan Heights meant removing education from the jurisdiction of the military in order to put it in the care of the newly formed

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<sup>217</sup> Druze Teacher from the Golan, interview by Daniel Stoker, (28-March 2012).

<sup>218</sup> Tarabieh. 44

Druze and Circassian Education department. The majority of the teachers in Golan-Druze schools are recruited locally and therefore identify themselves as Syrian rather than Israeli.<sup>219</sup> In the Golan the ministry of education closely monitors Druze teachers, many of whom disagree with how Druze tradition, identity, and culture are framed and disseminated in the Druze curriculum, in an effort to ensure that these teachers do not deviate from the designed curriculum or engage in any pro-Syrian activities.<sup>220</sup> All Druze teachers are carefully screened before being hired and because the majority of those in the Golan Heights are not Israeli citizens they are given year long contracts, which were up for renewal shortly before the beginning of each school year.<sup>221</sup> When the Israeli authorities choose not to renew a teacher's contract they are not required to give cause for their decision and the teacher is not able to appeal it.<sup>222</sup> Israel's efforts to maintain control over the classroom has muted attempts to create an open dialogue on the Golan-Druze and their role in the Jewish state.

Any teachers who wish to engage their classes in a dialogue on the political situation in the Golan or express their political opinions in the classroom risk losing their jobs. On average three teachers are dismissed annually by the Israeli authorities on the eve of the school year.<sup>223</sup> Under the purview of the Israeli government the only political discussions that are acceptable in the classroom are those that endorse Israel's narrative and are devoid of criticisms of the state. Since this narrative conflicts directly with the Syrian self-identification of most of the teachers in the Golan Heights most remain silent on matters pertaining to politics. The passive approach of Druze teachers in the Golan Heights undermines the Israeli efforts by taking politics out of the

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<sup>219</sup> Shamai. 454

<sup>220</sup> Molony, Stewart, and Tuohy-Hamil. 18

<sup>221</sup> Shamai. 454

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid. 456

classroom.<sup>224</sup> One Druze student from the Golan Heights expressed the dearth of politics in the classroom in these terms,

In my school we can discuss any subject as much as we wish to, as long as it is not related to politics. The teacher is not allowed to speak in class about political issues. If we wish to argue with a friend about political issues, we do it out of school. Inside school there is no political awareness. We get political awareness (and knowledge) only at home and in the street, but never ever from school. The teachers are afraid that the principal will reprimand them, and the principal in turn is afraid of the government.<sup>225</sup>

The pro-Syrian forces in the Golan Heights have capitalized on the absence of politics in the classroom by pointing to the political bias that exists in the school curriculum. The effectiveness of the Israeli-Druze curriculum in the Golan Heights is severely limited by the Druze community's promotion of their Syrian identity. In the Golan Heights there are significant differences in how Druze history and identity are framed in the classroom and in the streets and homes. Every time a political discussion arises on the streets or in the home the Israeli narrative is undermined.<sup>226</sup> If a Druze teacher seeks to confront these challenges to the Israeli narrative by the Syrian forces in the community his or her efforts are undermined by the belief that the teacher's motivations lie in keeping their job. Israel's hegemonic control of the education in the Golan Heights has undermined the legitimacy of large portions of the curriculum. When asked about the Druze heritage unit in Druze schools in the Golan Heights, one high school teacher remarked that the students show very little interest in the subject.<sup>227</sup> While the Golan-Druze overwhelmingly attend the Israeli run schools their attendance is viewed as a means of educating the community and not an endorsement of Israel's occupation of the Golan Heights.

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid. 455

<sup>225</sup> Ibid. 455

<sup>226</sup> Druze Teacher in the Golan Interview.

<sup>227</sup> Druze Teacher in the Golan Interview.



In the 1980's university education became an arena of competition for Druze support in the Golan Heights between Israel and Syria. The failure of the new Druze education program to win the loyalty of the Golan led the Israeli authorities to question permitting Golan-Druze to attend university in Syria. In response to protests against Israel's decision to annex the Golan Heights and impose citizenship on the Golan-Druze, Israel suspended the right of Druze to study in Syria (this issue will be covered in greater detail in chapter four).<sup>228</sup> In 1983 the Syrian authorities responded to Israel's policy by organizing and paying for scholarships for the Golan-Druze to study in the USSR. Under this new program the most politically active Druze in the Golan Heights chose who would be awarded with these new scholarships. Those empowered by the Syrian sponsored scholarship program often awarded scholarships to students who were politically active in their opposition to the occupation of the Golan Heights.<sup>229</sup> Rewarding political activism and rejection of Israel's occupation of the Golan Heights intensified resistance to Israeli efforts to co-opt the community.

These scholarships empowered some Golan-Druze economically. The majority of the Golan-Druze who take advantage of these scholarships received degrees in prestigious fields such as medicine, law, and dentistry.<sup>230</sup> While there are few jobs available for people with these degrees in the Golan Heights many are able to obtain work in cities like Haifa and Tel Aviv that enables them to assist their families financially.<sup>231</sup> Israel is blamed for the lack of professional jobs available in the Golan Heights and conversely due in part to their scholarship programs Syria is perceived as a great benefactor.<sup>232</sup> Losing the battle for the Golan-Druze, Israeli authorities lifted the ban on Druze study in Syria overseen by the International Red Cross in

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<sup>228</sup> Shamai. 553

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Molony, Stewart, Tuohy-Hamill. 134

<sup>231</sup> Druze City Official from the Golan, interview by Daniel Stoker, (March 27, 2012).

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

1989.<sup>233</sup> This decision enabled the Israeli authorities to select which students would be awarded scholarships for study in Syria and challenge pro-Syrian influences in the community.

The creation of the Druze Education Department was a success despite its struggles in the Golan Heights. By the mid-1980's criticisms of the new Druze curriculum and the political activities of the intellectuals had generally subsided. The reforms in Druze education were a boon to the Israeli-Druze community economically. They increased the demand for Druze teachers and administrators and the number of Druze working in these positions grew exponentially in the years after 1978.<sup>234</sup> The new schools established in Druze communities throughout northern Israel additionally created a large number of support staff jobs, some of which are designed for former Israeli-Druze soldiers. The increase in teaching positions catered to the Israeli-Druze intellectuals who in the 1960's and 1970's had few avenues to employment in Israel. These teachers while not as politically neutered as their counterparts in the Golan Heights risk losing their jobs if their politics become involved in the classroom. The economic growth in the community also dampened some of the criticisms of the state.

The educational reforms and the creation of the Druze Education Department served different purposes for Golan-Druze and the Israeli-Druze. The reform of Israeli-Druze curriculum and the formation of the Israeli-Druze school system created new ways of shaping Druze identity and a careers in relation to the state. In Israel these reforms expanded on the influences of service in the IDF and offered more economic support to the Druze community through the state. In response the growing chorus critical of Israel's "Druze policy" generally subsided and ideas of citizenship and the Druze role in the state were reinforced. In the Golan Heights however, these ideas were contested by Syria through their own education programs that

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<sup>233</sup> Tarabeigh. 46

<sup>234</sup> Almog

reached out to the Druze in the disputed territory. In response the Golan-Druze continued to reject Israeli citizenship and assert their Syrian nationality. While the Golan-Druze and Israeli-Druze socialize the Golan communities continues to try and strengthen relations with Syrian-Druze community instead of those in Israel. A number of issues will be discussed in the next chapter including the socialization between the two communities and the right of religious sheikhs to visit Syria.

## Identity Crises and Resistance

In the continuing struggle to win the sympathies of the Druze communities, both Israel and Syria valued the potential impact of disseminating national identities through education. They both realized the limitations of education alone in regard to their goals. As the efforts of both Israel and Syria influenced members of the Druze community, oppositional identities formed in the Druze community often based on geographical location and economic situation. Additionally it has become evident that efforts to un-imagine or reinvent the identity of the Golan-Druze is a futile endeavor. This chapter will explore how the Syrian facet of Golan-Druze identification has been so resilient and why that has complicated relations with the Israeli-Druze community. Furthermore this chapter will also discuss how the ongoing evolution of relations between the state and the Israeli-Druze community have been impacted by Israel's failure to address the demands of the community and the continued Arab nationalist discourse.

### **The 1982 Golan Strike**

After fourteen years of occupying the Golan Heights, the Israeli authorities embarked on their next phase of co-opting the Golan-Druze. The initial policy instituted in 1980 involved the offer of citizenship and with it favored treatment to any Golan-Druze who requested it. The Israeli authorities hoped this policy would usher in a host of Golan-Druze accepting Israeli citizenship and cut into the numbers of Druze calling for a return of the Golan Heights to Syria. This would in turn strengthen Israel's justification for the formal annexation of the territory while weakening Syria's claims to it.<sup>235</sup> With the support of Golan-Druze few international powers would condemn Israel's annexation plan. However, Israel's citizenship policies motivated the Golan-Druze to mobilize against annexation and imposed citizenship and in the

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<sup>235</sup> R. Scott Kennedy, "The Druze of the Golan: A Case of Non-Violent Resistance," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 1984: 48-64. 51

community contributed to the organization of widespread civil disobedience against the state and annexation.

Very few Golan-Druze sought out and applied for Israeli citizenship following Israel's offer to the community. In response to the offer of citizenship the Golan-Druze organized a community meeting in Majdal Shams in which it was decided that Israeli citizenship should be rejected by all in the Golan Heights.<sup>236</sup> Despite the potential harassment and risk of losing their jobs the vast majority of the Golan-Druze spurned the offers of Israeli citizenship. Viewing the acceptance of Israeli citizenship as a rejection of their Syrian and Arab heritage the community shunned those who went against the community's position on the matter. According to Jonathan Kuttab, a Palestinian lawyer who represented many Golan-Druze in their grievances against the state, "They decided that anyone who accepts Israeli identity cards is really cutting themselves off from the community 'They are no longer one of us, no longer a Druze'"<sup>237</sup>

The solidarity of the Golan-Druze alienated those who had accepted new identity papers. Few within the community would speak with the former community members. The newest Israeli-Druze were not welcome at community events, weddings, funerals, or other religious gatherings. The community also refused to offer prayers on behalf of the Israeli-Druze's deceased. The immense social pressure to reject citizenship pushed most of those who had done so to publicly recant their mistake and plead to be admitted back into the community.<sup>238</sup> Often this meant going door to door and apologizing to their neighbors or contributing money to the families of those who had been victimized most by Israel's occupation of the Golan-Heights.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid. 52

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Moloney, Stewart, Hamill-Touhy. 19

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

Israel's plan of a *de facto* annexation of the Golan Heights utterly failed due to the organization and solidarity of the Golan-Druze community.

Unable to garner the support of the Golan-Druze, Israeli authorities ignored international pressures and quickly moved to annex the disputed territory near the end of 1981. As part of this annexation plan the roughly twelve thousand Druze living in the Golan Heights would be expected to accept Israeli identity cards.<sup>240</sup> Some Israeli leaders downplayed the Golan-Druze reticence to accept Israeli identity cards, claiming that they feared the reprisals against their relatives in Syria.<sup>241</sup> This argument fails to explain the Pro-Syrian activities such as the flying of Syrian flags, involvement in espionage rings, and large protests that erupted in the early months of 1982. Concerns over the Druze reaction to the decision however were brushed aside and the Knesset opted to annex the Golan Heights. When the decision to annex the Golan Heights was pushed through the Knesset by Menachem Begin many aspects of the plan remained vague; including whether or not the Golan-Druze would be compelled to accept Israeli citizenship.<sup>242</sup> This move prompted concern among the Golan-Druze community who proudly adhered to their Syrian identity.

Instead of unilaterally demanding that the Golan-Druze accept Israeli citizenship, the authorities impeded the Golan-Druze who refused citizenship from doing anything remotely connected with the state unless they accepted citizenship. Those who went to obtain a driving license or a building permit were denied. Israel also refused to recognize the births of children to Druze without Israeli citizenship. In the early years of the occupation many Golan-Druze gained

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<sup>240</sup> William Claiborne, "Israelis Move Quickly to Implement Civilian Rule in the Golan Heights," *The Washington Post*, 26-December 1981: A16.

<sup>241</sup> Kennedy. 52 I can find no evidence of this being a real threat and it also fails to explain many of the pro-Syrian activities that were taking place in the Golan Heights at this time. This was most likely an attempt to allay concerns over Druze resistance.

<sup>242</sup> Claiborne, "Israeli Move Quickly to Implement Civilian Rule in the Golan Heights."

employment working in nearby Israeli settlements or teaching in the Israeli-Druze schools. These teachers and day laborers connected with the state or the settlements were fired for refusing to accept citizenship.<sup>243</sup> In February 1982 the leaders of the Golan-Druze community sent a telegram to Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin informing him of the communities intent to resist annexation and their commitment to Syria.<sup>244</sup> The Israeli responded by arresting the four Golan-Druze Sheikhs Kamāl al-Kanj, Sulīmān Kanj, Maḥmūd Ḥasan al-Şafadī, and Kanj Kanj on charges of inciting rebellion.<sup>245</sup> Following Israel's arrest of the Druze Sheikhs the community held a meeting to organize a resistance to the heavy handed policy of the Israel and formally reject Israel's annexation plan.<sup>246</sup> The plan adopted by the Golan-Druze called for mass civil disobedience including the refusal to pay taxes, rejection of Israeli services, and any form of Israeli civil law if the annexation plan was not rescinded. Again these threats were passed over by government officials claiming that the Druze would not follow through on their threats and the debacle was the result of Syrian propaganda.<sup>247</sup> The Israeli government underestimated the resolve of the Golan-Druze and their commitment to Syria.

By mid-February the Golan-Druze were committed to a massive strike shutting down schools and businesses through out the Golan Heights in both Druze villages and Israeli settlements.<sup>248</sup> Many Golan-Druze were determined and ready for a protracted struggle with the Israelis. In an interview with the Washington Post one Golan-Druze boasted, "Maybe the workers can stay at home without work for one year."<sup>249</sup> Most Druze households in the Golan

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<sup>243</sup> Moloney, Stewart, and Hamill-Touhy. 29

<sup>244</sup> William Claiborne, "Israel Arrests Druze Leaders in Golan Heights," *The Washington Post*, 14-February 1982: A33.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> William Claiborne, "General Strike by Druze Paralyzes Golan: Continued Protest Against Israel's Annexation is Expected," *The Washington Post*, 22-February 1982: A14.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

Heights began stock piling food and supplies in preparation for a long continued strike. Druze leaders began resigning from village councils and all but thirty of the three thousand Golan-Druze who worked in the settlements and state affiliated jobs refused to appear at work.<sup>250</sup> The rhetoric emerging from both the leaders of the strike and their followers was infused with Arab nationalism and the importance of the Druze community to the Arab community. Salmān Fahadin, one of the leaders of the strike, denounced Israel's intention of annexing the Golan Heights comparing it to a declaration of war while emphasizing their ties with the Arab nationalist cause. "Our strike proves that national unity is very strong among the Druze ... Our Patience is limited. The Israeli government's disrespect for us is part their disrespect for all Arabs of this region, including the Syrians."<sup>251</sup> Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights aroused intense pro-Syrian and pro-Arab sentiments among the Golan-Druze.

In the early days of the strike nationalist slogans and speeches were repeated often, decrying the acts of the Jewish occupation and its futility. Whether produced by young secular Druze or older more religious sheikhs their words nearly always emphasized unity with the Arab cause. One village elder from Buq'aātā declared, "We are united and the clarity with which this unity has appeared is based on our common Arab identity, which the Israelis seek to obliterate."<sup>252</sup> Another common theme among the Druze regarding the annexation was that Israel was hoping to strip them of their Arab identity. According to one young Druze villager the occupation was temporary but, "Now by annexing the Golan Heights the Israelis are forcing us to fight for our Arab identity and our Syrian Identity." Adding, "who are they to decide our

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> William Claiborne, "Israeli Annexation Stirs Sense of Nationalism in Druzes on Golan," *The Washington Post*, 26-February 1982: A23.



identity? Who are they to decide whether we shall be Arab or Israeli?”<sup>253</sup> An important aspect of Druze identity within the framework of Arab nationalism was their history of rebellion. One secular villager declared, “We [Druze] are the integral Arabs, we do not accept any rule but Arab rule. We rebelled against Turkish rule. We resisted French colonialism. Those who collaborated with Israel are religiously and socially shunned by us and they will learn the mistake of their ways.”<sup>254</sup>

The IDF military administration responded to the civil unrest in the Golan-Druze villages by cutting phone lines, restricting media personal from the region, and arresting other Druze who were thought to be leaders of the strike.<sup>255</sup> On 25 February 1982 the IDF sealed off villages entrances and drove through the streets blaring a message via loudspeakers that the inhabitants were not allowed to leave. When these measures failed to compel the Druze to cooperate IDF soldiers went door to door confiscating old identity papers replacing them with the new Israeli identity cards.<sup>256</sup> These acts only united the determined Golan-Druze in their defiance of the Israeli authorities.

The strike’s early success was in part due to the cooperative attitude of the villagers. Families shared food with those who did not have enough to hold out. The Golan-Druze villages embarked on village improvement projects in which each household donated labor and-or money to the project. One village used the early days of the strike to a complete sewer renovation project that had been neglected by the state the previous year.<sup>257</sup> In another village, members of the community collective worked in the orchards assuming the strike would continue into the fall and the harvest would be shared by all. Each village set up their own schools and construction

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Moloney, Stewart, and Hamill-Tuohy. 31

<sup>257</sup> Kennedy. 54

projects. They were also politically active throughout the strike demonstrating in front of Israeli soldiers. The villagers often sought out IDF soldiers and told them their plight and their desire for the dispute to remain peaceful.<sup>258</sup> The level of cooperation and the length of the strike demonstrated the Golan-Druze's commitment to maintain their Syrian identity and reject Israel's plans. This directly contradicted Israel's narrative that the whole thing was a charade and would end quickly due to the lack of Druze commitment.

By the end of March the Israelis realized that the strike was not going to disappear on its own accord and decided to change tactics. On 1 April 1982 between 13,000 and 15,000 IDF troops entered the Golan Heights surrounding the four Druze villages there. Electricity and water lines to the villages were cut and village schools were occupied. The IDF units even began demolishing a small number of houses and other buildings in the villages.<sup>259</sup> The IDF began a full scale siege in the Druze villages despite the non-violent nature of the strike. The Golan-Druze still refused to give in littering the village streets with their new IDF issued identity cards and organizing new demonstrations against the occupation daily. Despite intense pressure from the Israeli government, the Golan-Druze community stood firm in their resolve.

The IDF continued its campaign for two and a half more months arresting civilians by the hundreds and repressing popular demonstrations in the villages before regional politics refocused Israel's attention. A few prominent members of the Israeli-Druze community tried to mediate the conflict but failed to convince either the Israeli government or the Golan-Druze to back down.<sup>260</sup> Repeated guerilla raids from southern Lebanon shifted Israel's attention from the

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid. 54

<sup>259</sup> Moloney, Stewart, and Hamill-Tuohy. 31

<sup>260</sup> It is uncertain whether or not Israeli-Druze soldiers serving in the IDF were part of the large IDF contingent that occupied the Golan villages during the strike. I have found no news sources or articles that address this issue and the stories I received from speaking with the Druze often conflicted on the role of the

Golan Heights to Lebanon and in June 1982 the IDF invaded southern Lebanon. Convinced that their strike would not succeed without media attention the leadership of Golan-Druze reached a tacit agreement with the Israeli authorities and suspended their strike.<sup>261</sup> Under this agreement the Golan-Druze would accept new Israeli issued identity cards providing that the cards recognized their Syrian nationality. The agreement also stipulated that the government would not confiscate Druze land or interfere with Golan water sources.<sup>262</sup> Furthermore Israel would respect their Syrian-Arab identity by listing it on their new identity cards. Finally there would be open crossings into Syria and Golan-Druze would be permitted to export their produce to Syrian markets.<sup>263</sup> Despite no formal agreement the Golan-Druze officially suspended their strike in late June.

### **Discontent and Protest in the Israeli-Druze Community**

While the strike had ended a large number of Golan-Druze still refused to accept new identity cards because they did not specify national identity; instead their nationality was listed as undefined.<sup>264</sup> Periodically, the IDF would arrest handfuls of Golan-Druze for refusing to carry the Israeli identity cards. Simultaneously, discontent among the Israeli-Druze communities was on the rise. This discontent centered around Israeli land policies that had gradually been stripping the Druze and other Arabs of their lands since the inception of the state.<sup>265</sup> As mentioned in chapter two the Israeli-Druze had traditionally relied on agriculture to make a living. The early losses in agricultural jobs were offset by new employment opportunities in the

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Israeli-Druze in the strike. It was confirmed however that the Israeli-Druze help police the Golan Heights typically in mixed Jewish-Druze units.

<sup>261</sup> It is unclear whether or not the political power of the Lebanese-Druze influenced Israel's decision to grant these terms to the Golan-Druze. The Lebanese-Druze had at times been powerful allies of PLO forces in Lebanon and were skilled soldiers threatening Israel's. The Druze's reputation for communalism could have influenced Israel to come to terms with those in the Golan in order to placate a potential enemy in Lebanon.

<sup>262</sup> Moloney, Stewart, and Hamil-Tuohy. 33

<sup>263</sup> Kennedy. 56

<sup>264</sup> Druze Shop Owner Ein Qinya, interview by author. (March 27, 2012)

<sup>265</sup> Firro. *The Druzes in the Jewish State*. 219

military, police force, and later in the new Israeli-Druze schools. The Israeli-Druze expressed their opposition to Israel's land expropriation policies but never had mobilized in a way that forced Israel to address their concerns.

Employment opportunities in the military and education were limited and could not accommodate the growing Israeli-Druze population, this created problems for new generations of Druze seeking employment. Israel's strict control of both who possessed the land and how the land would be used prohibited the industrial development in Israeli-Druze villages. Other than the Qadamani brothers' factory in the village of Yarka, industrialization was nearly absent from Druze villages.<sup>266</sup> As explained to me by one Druze village official, the Druze, like other Israeli-Arabs, are rarely granted building permits. Not only does this limit building factories, produce storage, and food processing plants but also the construction of new homes and the expansion of Druze villages.<sup>267</sup> This has left Israeli-Druze villages with few local employment opportunities that do not involve working for the state. This forced many Israeli-Druze to seek employment in settlements many as far away as the Negev desert. According to a field study by Yūsuf Ḥasan, a Druze researcher, by the late 1980's more than sixty percent of the Israeli-Druze community were working outside of their own villages.<sup>268</sup>

Israeli-Druze protests focused around land and the freedom to access agricultural land and irrigation water. The Israel government allocated only .056 percent of irrigation water to the Druze community despite the Druze community constituting nearly two percent of the total

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid. 218, This factory did however benefit from government aid in the 1980's and today is one of the largest steel mills in the Middle East.

<sup>267</sup> Druze City Official from the Golan, interview by Daniel Stoker, (27-March 2012). In the 1990's it was estimated that nearly sixty percent of all construction in Daliyat al-Carmel, the largest Israeli-Druze village and the first Druze village to openly collaborate with Israel, was done illegally due to the difficulty of obtaining the proper permits from the state. (See Hoffman. 1991)

<sup>268</sup> Firro. *The Druzes in the Jewish State*. 219

population and the majority of them living in agrarian communities.<sup>269</sup> At the same time Israeli settlements continued to be constructed on confiscated lands. During the Lebanese Civil War interactions between Israeli and Lebanese-Druze led many IDF Druze soldiers to question their allegiance to Israel.<sup>270</sup> In the 1980's some Israeli-Druze began to aggressively oppose these discriminatory policies demanding access to their lands and resources. The village of Beit Jan located in the Upper-Galilee is a great example of how some Israeli-Druze mobilized at this time.

In the 1950's the Israeli government established a national park adjacent to the village and zoned a significant portion of Druze land as wilderness prohibiting cultivation or construction on them.<sup>271</sup> In the 1980's disagreements over the state's control of Druze owned land came to a head as the village spear headed by their mayor undertook a campaign to wrest their lands from the national park's control. The movement initially operated through the state channels of authority; petitioning the Knesset and even organizing a meeting between the village mayor and then Prime Minister Shimon Peres.<sup>272</sup> The meetings did not result in any concessions prompting the Arab nationalist and Palestinian movements to spring to the defense of the small Druze village through demonstrations, press release, and rallies denouncing Israel.<sup>273</sup> In March 1987, the Druze municipality decided that the village should strike provoking a violent campaign of repression by the IDF.

The Israeli-Druze repeatedly voiced that their claims to the land preceded the establishment of Israel and that the state had no right to interfere in their affairs. A group of Israeli-Druze from Beit Jan built a make shift settlement in the heart of the national park adjacent

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> John Maher, "Between Israel and Lebanon: The Druze Intifada of October 2007," *Israel Affairs*, 2009: 413-426. 418

<sup>271</sup> Oren Yiftachel and Michael D. Segal, "Jews and Druze in Israel: State Control and Ethnic Resistance," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 1998: 476-506.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid. 496

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

to Beit Jan asserting that the land was theirs. In July the IDF approached the small encampment in an attempt to evacuate the area prompting an escalation of violence. The Israeli-Druze attempted to fight off the IDF turning police vehicles upside down and setting them on fire.<sup>274</sup> In response the IDF forces arrested over one hundred Druze. The strike continued for two more months before the Israeli authorities stepped down and entered into serious negotiations on the matter. The next year a land exchange program was imposed on the village who never assented to it. The state justified the land grab asserting that the Druze were being given better land closer to their villages in exchange for large uncultivable tracts of land further from the village.<sup>275</sup> While the strikes had subsided the discontent of the Israeli-Druze still lingered.

The imagined shared history of the Jews and the Druze continued to be undermined by the discriminatory policies of the state. The Israeli-Druze perceptions that they were partners with the Jews in building Israel were fading. Throughout the 1990's the Israeli-Druze continued to demand equality from the state.<sup>276</sup> Speaking on the position of the Druze in Israeli society the prominent Israeli-Druze news editor, Rafīq Ḥalabī, castigated Israelis for their neglect of the Druze saying, "We are not in the minds of, or even in the back of the minds of Israelis . . . Israeli society is dealing with its existence and that's all, they don't give a damn for anyone else."<sup>277</sup> Israeli-Druze soldiers spoke out more frequently on the lack of employment opportunities after their military service. By the 1990's the security sector was responsible for the employment of nearly one-third of the Israeli-Druze and in disadvantaged villages like Beit Jan the number of those employed by the security sector rose to nearly two-thirds.<sup>278</sup> One Israeli-Druze noted that

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid. 497

<sup>275</sup> Ibid. 498

<sup>276</sup> David Hoffman, "The Israeli-Druze Complain of Bias," *The Washington Post*, May 6, 1993: A31.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

as soon as he hung up his rifle he was treated like an “Arab.”<sup>279</sup> Another common complaint was that despite their reputation as quality soldiers and good citizens many qualified Druze were passed over for high military or government positions.<sup>280</sup> The sentiment of the Israeli-Druze is captured in the words of Druze Knesset member Sheikh Şālih Ṭarīf.

The Druze have been fooled for too long. We cannot and will not put up any more with empty promises and hollow gestures in return to the blood of our sons. We will employ all means within our command to achieve what we rightly deserve: total equality with the Jews in all aspects of life in Israel. As proud Druze we will fight to the end.<sup>281</sup>

Israel’s response to the demands of the Israeli-Druze community has been to grant token concessions that do little to alleviate the economic plight of the community. For example in 1992 Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, noting that Jewish students received nearly twice as much funding as Druze students, instituted a five year plan to close the funding gap between Druze and Jewish schools.<sup>282</sup> The gaps in funding were never realized. Another example is the decision to allocate more irrigation water to Israeli-Druze villages in 1995, however the increase in irrigation water did not sufficiently meet the community’s needs.<sup>283</sup> Occasionally the government appointed an Israeli-Druze to high positions either in the IDF or Israeli foreign service.<sup>284</sup> These measures helped dampen the dissent coming from the Israeli-Druze community but failed to answer the community’s calls for equal treatment. Despite these calls for equal treatment a strong pro-Israeli Druze leadership still perpetuated the founding narrative of the state. Yūşil Naşir al-Dīn, chairman of the Zionist Druze Movement<sup>285</sup>, traveled to the US and Canada on

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> Yiftachel and Segal.

<sup>282</sup> Almog.

<sup>283</sup> Firro. *The Druzes in the Jewish State*. 219

<sup>284</sup> Amos Harel, "New Top Jobs for Druze Officers," *Haaretz English Edition*, August 15, 2001, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/new-top-jobs-for-druze-officers-1.67004>.

<sup>285</sup> The Zionist Druze Movement was founded in 1973 by Druze politician Amil Nasir al-Din. Al-Din won a seat in the Knesset in 1977 on the Likud ticket. The group was founded with the intent of promoting the state of Israel.

behalf of the World Zionist Organization asserting that the Druze are not Arab nor are they Muslim and that Israel is the protector of their religious independence.<sup>286</sup> This view directly conflicted with that of those Druze who sympathized with the Arab nationalist and Palestinian cause.

### **Looking to Syria in the Golan**

The efforts of individuals like Naṣir al-Dīn helped widen the gulf existing between the Druze in the Golan Heights and those in Israel. In the Golan Heights the majority of the Druze choose to strengthen their ties with the Druze community in Syria rather than build stronger ties with the Israeli-Druze, whom they could easily visit.<sup>287</sup> Although Druze religious leaders from both communities continued to meet regularly, the level of social interaction between the two geographical communities remained cool despite three decades of separation from Syria.<sup>288</sup> This is evidenced by the marriage rates between Israeli-Druze and Golan-Druze. In the early 1990's the International Committee of the Red Cross, who oversees the Qunīṭrā border crossing connecting the Golan Heights to Syria, brokered an agreement between Israel and Syria on behalf of the Druze community that permitted Druze women to migrate to either the Golan or Syria for the purpose of marriage.<sup>289</sup> However, once they receive the permission and cross the border into Syria they are not allowed to return to visit their families or friends in the Golan Heights.<sup>290</sup> This agreement enabled the Druze in both the Golan and Syria to cultivate new ties linking the severed communities. This marriage process is an arduous ordeal filled with heaps of

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<sup>286</sup> Suzanne Wintrob, "Druze Leaders Describe Their Identity in Israel," *The Toronto Star*, December 6, 1990: N10. The Zionist Druze Movement was founded in 1973 by Amil Naṣir al-Dīn, a Druze Knesset member, in order to combat the rising pro-Arab sympathies among the Druze.

<sup>287</sup> Jeffrey Sheban, "In the Golan Heights, a Druze Family is as Divided as the Land They Call Home," *Christian Science Monitor*, 9-August 1999: 6.

<sup>288</sup> Hajjar. 5

<sup>289</sup> Hannah Russell, *Breaking Down the Fence: Addressing the Illegality of Family Separation in the Occupied Golan* (Majdal Shams: al-Marsad, 2010).

<sup>290</sup> Ksenia Svetlova, "From Syria with Love," *The Jerusalem Report*, 19-December 2011: 20.



bureaucratic paper work and red tape.

This is the process that is somewhat accurately depicted in the 2004 film *The Syrian Bride*. In the film the bride experiences countless delays prohibiting her from entering Syria to be married delaying her marriage for months. This process can last years before the Syrian and Israeli governments agree to allow the marriage to happen.<sup>291</sup> Before a Syrian bride is allowed into the Golan Heights or a Golani bride allowed into Syria, marriage arrangements must be made in order to obtain the proper paper work. The Golan-Druze often negotiate these marriage contracts through family contacts in Syria or religious sheikhs visiting Syria for religious purposes. These marriages help cement family ties and loyalties. It is also common that these marriages result from Golan-Druze who began courting a Syrian during their studies in Syria.<sup>292</sup> While Golan-Druze students who meet and marry Syrian-Druze during their studies in Damascus have the option to remain in Syria, most feel obligated to return to the Golan to ensure that their land is not confiscated by Israelis.<sup>293</sup> Both Golan-Druze and Syrian-Druze make meaningful sacrifices to ensure that the two communities are linked.

Despite the burdensome process that takes place before immigration and the harsh restrictions on family visitations which essentially amounts to saying good bye to villages the Golan-Druze continue to chose to marry Syrians rather than their coreligionists in Israel. When I asked one Golan-Druze why they do not choose to marry Israeli-Druze more often, he simply shrugged and told me that they don't interact with them as often.<sup>294</sup> This is strange considering the obstacles confronting those seeking to maintain family ties between the Golan and Syria.

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<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> This was relayed to me by a Druze restaurant worker who knew some Golan-Druze who married girls they met while studying in Syria. interview by author. (March 28, 2012).

<sup>293</sup> Druze city official in the Golan. interview by author. (March 27, 2012). This official told me that it is imperative that all arable Druze land must continue to tilled and cared for by the Druze. According to him the Israelis would confiscate any land that is allowed to go fallow. He said this the reason that so many Golan-Druze work seasonally in agriculture in the Golan before returning to Israel proper to work in construction.

<sup>294</sup> Druze restaurant worker in Mass'ada. Interview with author. (March 28, 2012).

Marriage between the Golan-Druze and the Israeli-Druze does occur but it is unclear how it compares to the trend of marrying Syrian-Druze.<sup>295</sup> The Syrian-Druze and Golan-Druze often share more in common ideologically and politically. Interaction between the communities is encouraged and before the rise of the internet communities members would meet at the border and shout greetings to one another across the demilitarized zone with the use of loudspeakers. Those from both communities who are financially able use Jordan, which holds diplomatic relations with both countries, as a place to meet and cultivate relations between them. The Golan-Druze explain that they do this because they are Syrian and it is important to engage their homeland.<sup>296</sup> The loyalty of the Golan-Druze to their Syrian homeland have been rewarded by the al-Asad regime.

In 1999 Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak entered into negotiations with Syrian President Ḥāfīz al-Asad over normalizing relations between the two states. At the center of these negotiations was the issue of returning the Golan Heights to Syria. Whether Barak entered into these negotiations in good faith or just stalling the peace process is unclear, but it did evoke fears from a small minority of Golan-Druze who feared being returned Syrian control.<sup>297</sup> When the peace talks failed the Syrian government expanded their efforts to maintain the loyalty of the Golan-Druze. In 2003, reports that the Syrian government had begun paying the pensions of

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<sup>295</sup> In her study on the Israeli-Druze Lisa Hajjar notes that marriage rates between the Israeli-Druze and the Golan-Druze are low and insists that there is a cultural separation between the two communities. However in his study of the Druze, Robert Brenton Betts asserts that relations between the communities are normal and marriage is a regular occurrence. Neither of these two scholars addressed the topic of marriage to Syrian-Druze. In my interviews the interviewees were often unclear on the matter of marriage only asserting the importance of marrying within the community. It is also worth mentioning the number of secular Israeli-Druze converted to Judaism for the sole purpose of marrying Israeli women.

<sup>296</sup> Druze merchant in Majdal Shams. interview by author. (March 26, 2012)

<sup>297</sup> Tracy Wilkinson, "Israelis in the Golan Heights Fear Pact Will Lead to Displacement," *Los Angeles Times*, July 29, 1999.

seventy-three Golan-Druze teachers surfaced in Israel.<sup>298</sup> This Syrian policy directed at the Golan came in response to Israeli pressure on teachers to accept Israeli citizenship and with it tenure at the Israeli-Druze schools in the Golan Heights. One teacher benefiting from the program complained that the Golan-Druze teachers received “nothing” from Israel and that Syria is, “giving them everything they deserve.”<sup>299</sup> Programs like this continued to foster Syrian and Arab nationalism among the Golan-Druze despite being occupied by Israel considerably longer than they had been a part of the modern Syrian nation-state.

The regime of Bashār al-Asad continued to seek ways to reinforce Syrian identity in the Golan Heights. One of the demands of the Golan-Druze strike that paralyzed the region in 1982 was the right to sell their produce to Syrian markets.<sup>300</sup> Agriculture has remained at the center of the Golan-Druze economy and the community depended on the apple and cherry harvests to sustain their standard of living. Depending on how plentiful the crop is, the cherry and apple harvests can employ as much as fifty percent of the Golan-Druze work force on a seasonal basis and the income from the harvest on a good year can be as much as seventy percent of the Golan-Druze economy.<sup>301</sup> However Druze farmers in the Golan Heights faced increased competition from Jewish farmers who were able to use their market connections and water privileges to cut into the market.<sup>302</sup> In 2005, al-Asad’s government agreed to open the border to apple shipments from Golan-Druze farmers.

The Golan-Druze benefited not only from access to the Syrian market but also to Arab markets where trade restrictions prohibited the import of Israeli produce. Many of the apples

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<sup>298</sup> Menachem Horowitz, “Syria Paying Teachers’ Pensions in Golan Heights,” *Israeli Channel 2 TV, Jerusalem* (6-February 2003).

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> Kennedy. 56

<sup>301</sup> Druze city official in the Golan. interview by author. (March 27, 2012).

<sup>302</sup> The International Committee of the Red Cross, “Syria: Golan Apples Boost Local Economy and Bring Hopes to Farmers,” *The International Committee of the Red Cross*, 12-April 2011, <http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/feature/2011/golan-feature-2011-04-12.htm>.

trucked into Syria from the Golan were than in turn exported as Syrian produce to other markets. The price of apples is set by the Golan farmers and the International Committee of the Red Cross oversees the transfer of Golan apples from the Golan to Damascus via the border crossing at Qunītrā.<sup>303</sup> In the first year of the program 4000 tons of apples were exported from the Golan Heights to Syrian markets and that number has continued to grow every year with the exception of 2008 when poor growing conditions contributed to a below average harvest.<sup>304</sup> Today the number of apples being exported to Syria has tripled from 4000 tons in 2005 to 12,000 tons the last two years.<sup>305</sup> The 12,000 tons exported to Syria accounts for approximately forty percent of the total apple crop in the Golan-Druze villages.<sup>306</sup> The apple trade has created a wealth of goodwill toward the Syrian regime in the Golan Heights and reinforced the Syrian identity of the Druze there.

The role the apple trade plays in reinforcing Syrian identity in the Golan should not be understated. Basām Abū ‘Awad, a Golan-Druze apple farmer, credits the apple trade for his strong Syrian identity saying, “Getting the fruit into the rest of Syria helps us [Golan-Druze] maintain close ties with our relatives on the other side and gives us back a sense of identity.”<sup>307</sup> Through this program President al-Asad has successfully cultivated goodwill toward the Syrian regime in the Golan Heights. Sayyed Farhart, a Golan-Druze who works closely with the apple transfer, stressed the importance of the Syrian president to the Golan-Druze saying, “We thank

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

<sup>304</sup> The International Committee of the Red Cross, “Occupied Golan: Nurturing Ties with the Rest of Syria,” *The International Committee of the Red Cross*, 15-February 2011, <http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/update/2011/golan-update-2011-02-15.htm>

<sup>305</sup> The International Committee of the Red Cross, “Occupied Golan: ICRC to transfer record quantity of apples to Syria,” *The International Committee of the Red Cross*, 14-February 2011, <http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/new-release/2011/isreal-syria-news-2011-02-14.htm>

<sup>306</sup> Druze villager in Buq’aātā, interview by author. (March 28, 2012) Druze city official in the Golan, interview by author. (March 27, 2012)

<sup>307</sup> The International Committee of the Red Cross, “Syria: Golan Apples Boost Local Economy and bring hope to local farmers.”

our President, Bashār al-Asad, who is providing support for the farmers. The hope is that there will be a free market when peace comes.”<sup>308</sup> Similar feelings were stressed by the Golan-Druze whom I interviewed. All of them stressed their gratitude for the Syrian regime’s support of the apple industry in the Golan and all with the exception of one expressed their belief that Syria’s role in the apple industry is vital to the economy of the Golan Heights. Conversely Israel is seen as the cause of economic woes in the Golan Heights.

The poor apple crop in 2008 was the result of drought. The Golan Druze blamed Israel for the lack of irrigation claiming that they had failed to properly manage the water resources in the Golan Heights and this led to the inadequate water supply in 2008 and 2009. The Golan-Druze protested Israel’s water management policies in 2010 over fears that Lake Ram near the village of Mass‘ada could possibly dry up due in part Israel’s misallocation of water resources.<sup>309</sup> Syrian officials took advantage of the situation and entered into indirect talks with Israel over exporting 200 million cubic liters of water into the Golan Heights.<sup>310</sup> If such talks succeed the Golan-Druze will look to Syria again as a sort of protector of Druze livelihood in the Golan Heights . Concurrently the Golan-Druze are blaming Israel for curtailing economic development in their villages through the enforcement of their strict building codes and reticence to grant building permits to the Golan-Druze. City officials blame these policies for constricting the natural growth which the Israeli authorities commonly use to argue for settlement expansion in the West Bank and the Golan Heights.<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> Eli Ashkenazi, “Israeli Trucks Cross into Syria in Annual 'Apple Invasion',” *Haaretz, English*, 3-March 2010, <http://www.haaretze.com/print-edition/news/Israeli-trucks-cross-into-syria-in-annual-apple-invasion-1.266339>

<sup>309</sup> British Broadcasting Corp., “In Pictures: Disappearing Golan Lake,” *bbc.co.uk*, October 28, 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-11605720>.

<sup>310</sup> Tzvi Ben Gedalyahu, “Indirect Talks with Syria to Trade 'Apples for Water',” *Israel National News*, January 4, 2011, [http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/141536#.T5w\\_OMQtjfj](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/141536#.T5w_OMQtjfj)

<sup>311</sup> Druze city official in the Golan, interview by author. (March 27, 2012)

## Resistance, Compliance, and Economics

As the Golan-Druze and Syria were cementing their relationship, the Israeli-Druze appeared to be undergoing an identity crisis. The Israeli-Druze community's seemingly perpetual quest for equality had led many to question their role in the state and how they fit within the society around them. The outbreak of the second Intifada and the use of Israeli-Druze soldiers in particularly intense campaigns in the West Bank and Gaza prompted Arab leaders to speak out against the Druze and call for the community's leadership to restrain them.<sup>312</sup> Many prominent figures in the Israeli-Druze community blamed the behavior on the state and the manner in which the Druze are treated in the context of Israeli society. Rabāḥ Ḥalabī, an Israeli-Druze and professor of education at Haifa University, explained the behavior of Druze soldiers as symptomatic of their treatment within the larger society. "The twofold rejection (by Arabs and Israelis) makes them feel suspended between heaven and earth as if they are neither here nor there" and they express "considerable frustration and anger both at the Arabs that reject them and the Jews that deceive, even betray, them."<sup>313</sup> Ḥalabī also likened the Druze in the IDF to Algerian soldiers in the French army who felt the need to "prove their mettle" to their French comrades in order to win their trust.<sup>314</sup> While the Israeli-Druze continued to identify themselves as Druze there was little agreement over how the Druze fit into the greater society around them.<sup>315</sup>

During the second Intifada more and more Druze began to vocally oppose service in the IDF. Some Israeli-Druze began advocating a faith oriented lifestyle that rejected politics

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<sup>312</sup> Yair Ettinger, "Can Druze Identity Survive Its Neighbors?," *Haaretz English*, December 23, 2004, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/can-druze-identity-survive-its-neighbors-1.144952>

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

<sup>314</sup> Yair Ettinger, "Druze Torn in their Relationship with the State," *Haaretz English*, December 19, 2004, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/druze-torn-in-their-relation-with-the-state-1.144467>.

<sup>315</sup> Ettinger, "Can Druze Identity Survive Its Neighbors

including military service and advocated a return to more conservative mores and isolation from the outside world.<sup>316</sup> Still others identifying with Palestinians and Israeli-Arabs felt they should not engage in combat against their “Arab brothers.” The Israeli-Druze who affiliated themselves with the Arab and Palestinians faced discrimination in Israel. In 2004 ‘Alā’ Nafa’a, an Israeli-Druze from Beit Jan, lost his job for expressing why he refused to serve in the IDF in a televised interview broadcast in Israel.<sup>317</sup> In the interview Nafa’a explained why he chose to spend time in an Israeli prison rather than serve in the military saying, “I belong to a nation that is at war with Israel. I cannot fight my own people, it is my national and legal right not to enlist.”<sup>318</sup> Following the broadcast of the interview his employer chose to dismiss him because of his views. Despite calls for a change to Israeli policy relating to military service coming from the Israeli-Druze community over eighty percent of Israeli-Druze men continued to enlist in the IDF. This was at least in part due to the Israeli-Druze’s overreliance on the state.

The Israeli-Druze’s frustrations with the state erupted again in 2007 in the village of Peki’in. Peki’in’s population consists of a majority of Druze and a growing minority of Jewish settlers. In the years preceding the incident in 2007 settlers had intensified efforts to grow the Jewish community in Peki’in.<sup>319</sup> In October a large group of Druze youth in Peki’in burned down a radio antenna on a Jewish settler’s property and the action was repeated when the antenna was replaced. When the police entered the town after nightfall to arrest the perpetrators they were met by a violent resistance from these youth. The youth were not intimidated by the body armor and tear gas of the police units and engaged them in combat. During the ensuing riot

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<sup>316</sup> Yair Ettinger, "Rejected by Israel and the Arab World, Druze Society is Turning to Religion," *Haaretz English*, December 24, 2004, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/rejected-by-Israel-and-the-arab-world-druze-society-is-turning-to-religion-1.145111>

<sup>317</sup> Eli Ashkenazi, "Druze Fired for Expressing Support for Refusal on Television," *Haaretz English*, July 7, 2004, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/druze-fired-for-expressing-support-for-refusal-on-television>

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> Maher, 419

Jewish homes were vandalized and a female police officer was taken hostage by the youth.<sup>320</sup> Somewhat miraculously no one was killed. Stunned by the violence the older Druze intervened in the conflict, first protecting the hostage from the anger of the youth and later helping negotiate a deal between the authorities and the community.<sup>321</sup> While a handful of Druze youth were arrested they were all released within a few days of the incident. The Peki'in riot revealed not only a divide between the pro-Arab and pro-Israel Druze but a generational divide in the community.

Despite the growing Arab sympathies in the Israeli-Druze community the majority of them continue to identify themselves as Israelis. This evidenced by the success right wing political parties such as Likud enjoy in Israeli-Druze villages.<sup>322</sup> Doubts persist within the community as to how the Druze fit into the future of the state. Shortly after the Peki'in riots one Israeli-Druze expressed his doubts about how the Druze fit into the state and long term plans of their Jewish leaders saying,

We are screwed, we are losing our identity. The Arabs in Israel have a pillow to rest on at night because they feel they are Palestinians. We don't know who we are. I'm jealous of the Druze in Lebanon and Syria. They know who they are. In the end, we'll be like the SLA [South Lebanese Army]. They'll use us and throw us away.<sup>323</sup>

Both in the Golan and in Israel, Druze resistance and protest have been common in their interactions with the Israeli government. However this resistance has not resulted in closer ties between the Golan and Israeli-Druze communities. The Israeli-Druze's cooperation with Israel and their support for right wing Israeli parties such as Likud<sup>324</sup> have alienated the Golan-Druze. There is also a linguistic divide as more and more Israeli-Druze speak Hebrew more regularly

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid. 420

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> Mordechai Nisan, "The Druze in Israel: Questions of Identity, Citizenship, and Patriotism," *The Middle East Journal*, 2010: 575-596. 583

<sup>323</sup> Hamdy. 415

<sup>324</sup> Arguably the most powerful Israeli-Druze politician in Israel today is Ayūb Kara who has been a long time supporter of Likud.



than they do Arabic.<sup>325</sup> Marriage rates continue to remain low between the communities as the Golan-Druze look toward the Syrian-Druze and the more accessible Israeli-Druze community for guidance. It is however possible that continued resistance to the state will push the two communities closer together in the future.

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<sup>325</sup> Ettinger. "Can Druze Identity Survive Its Neighbors"

## Beyond the Nation: The Future of the Druze in the Golan and Israel

Our community resembles the raven that wanted to learn the walk of the partridge. When it failed, it attempted to go back to its own way of walking, but it had forgotten that too. Now it's neither a raven nor a partridge. – An old Israeli-Druze villager<sup>326</sup>

Europe's destruction of the Ottoman Empire and the colonization of the Levant which led to imposition of the European nation-state system on the region violently challenged traditional societies and politics. The new nation-state slowly encroached on traditional notions of autonomy and government demanding new allegiance and loyalties. In the process the Druze community was transformed both internally and externally. Before the twentieth century the Druze had been able to carve pockets of autonomy out of the ruling empires and for the most part were able to sustain this autonomy through their isolation, unity, and military prowess. However the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the expansion of the nation-states which succeeded it slowly divided the Druze, stripped them of their autonomy, and incorporated them into the new governing bodies with competing interests and national identities. During this process both Zionists and Arab nationalists invented history and traditions that incorporated the Druze into the imagined nations. In the middle of the century the Druze actively seemed to embrace these new national identities as they interacted with the state. Nowhere is this more clear than Israel where the Druze are privileged above other Arabs but still not treated as equals. Recently the Israeli-Druze community has shown signs that the younger generation is rejecting the founding narrative of the state and trying to strengthen their connections with the Druze in Syria and Lebanon.<sup>327</sup>

This leads one to wonder: can the nation be unimagined?

In my visit to the Golan Heights I spoke with a Druze teacher who expressed his derision for nationalism and nation-states. In his mind the Druze were progressing past nationalism

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<sup>326</sup> Gabriel Ben-Dor, *The Druzes in Israel: A Political Study* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1979). Intro

<sup>327</sup> Ettinger. "Rejected by Israel and the Arab World, Druze Society Turning to Religion."

blaming political leaders for the borders that divided the peoples of the Levant. He opined that “there is co-existence here, I am receiving my education from Damascus and my pay check from Israel. Syrians always tell me they would like to visit Tel-Aviv and try the hummus and my friends in Tel-Aviv say the same thing about Damascus.”<sup>328</sup> These sentiments are echoed by another Golan-Druze who confided, “When there is peace, I don’t care which citizenship I have or who the government is.”<sup>329</sup> However these Druze still cling to Syrian citizenship and remain politically active in relation to their state. Recently the Golan-Druze have been protesting both on behalf of and against besieged President Bahār al-Asad.<sup>330</sup> Why have they held so tightly to their citizenship and remained politically active despite Israeli pressure to become Israelis?

There is no simple answer to this question. The Golan-Druze have been able to maintain at least partial family, economic, political, and cultural associations with the Syrian-Druze community for decades despite the occupation and the acrimony that exists between Syria and Israel. While the Golan-Druze could lose the benefits they currently enjoy from the Syrian government if they were to accept Israel’s offer of citizen, they would also find new benefits in Israel including the right to vote and possibly serve in the military and police forces. It appears that there is no specific reason why the Golan-Druze continue to identify themselves as Syrian, but there are many influence ranging from the political to the cultural that may all contribute to this identity. In Israel the answer is no less difficult to answer. At the founding of the Jewish states certain opportunities were afforded the Israeli-Druze that were not afforded to other Arab minorities. These opportunities opened Israeli-Druze society to new influences and with them

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<sup>328</sup> Druze teacher in the Golan Heights, interview by author. (March 28, 2012).

<sup>329</sup> Noga Tarnopolsky, "Stuck in the Middle With the Druze," *The Global Post*, 4 15, 2012, <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/region/middle-east/israel-and-palestine/120412/syria-israel-golan-heights-druze?page=full>.

<sup>330</sup> Amy Tiebel, "Golan Druze Begin to Doubt Assad," *The Times of Israel*, February 22, 2012, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/golan-druze-begin-to-doubt-assad/>. Aaron Kalman, "Druze Residents of Israel Hold Pro-Assad Rally," *The Times of Israel*, February 14, 2012, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/druze-residents-of-israel-support-assad/>

new means of identifying themselves. Israeli-Druze have engaged the Jewish state regularly and to a large degree have increasingly adopted Israeli lifestyles.<sup>331</sup> While the Golan-Druze and Israeli-Druze are divided by national identities these divisions are by no means insurmountable.

The fissures that have occurred in the Druze community as a result of the rise of nation-states in the Levant are limited. The religious leaders of the community still meet on a regular basis and unlike secular Druze are allowed to traverse borders from Israel to Syria, Lebanon, and vice-versa. The political leaders in the Druze community have demonstrated degrees of continuity between the divisions that separate the Druze. During Israel's many invasions of Southern Lebanon there were often reports of Israeli-Druze soldiers assisting their Lebanese coreligionists and even feigning battles between each other.<sup>332</sup> Israeli-Druze politicians have also often interceded on behalf of their coreligionists in the Golan. Ayyūb Kara<sup>333</sup>, an Israeli-Druze member of Knesset, has often assisted Syrian brides gain access to the Golan Heights to wed their fiancés. These areas of cooperation however do not translate into shared political views. During 2006 when Israel invaded Southern Lebanon to fight Hizbullah the Israeli and Golan-Druze found themselves supporting different sides.<sup>334</sup> These relatively new borders have also limited social interaction and linguistic commonality.<sup>335</sup>

In both the Golan Heights and Israel proper there are cultural factors from media, politics, dress, and language that influence the national identity of both communities. These cultural factors have created Israeli and Syrian gravitational centers that have pulled the Druze

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<sup>331</sup> Jack Khoury, "First Druze Kibbutz Members Say They're 'enveloped with love'," *Haaretz English*, March 8, 2012, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/first-druze-kibbutz-members-say-they-re-enveloped-with-love-1.417208> (accessed April 28, 2012).

<sup>332</sup> Maher. 416

<sup>333</sup> Is a member of Likud and is a particularly right wing politician who has often claimed the Druze and Jews to descend from Jethro.

<sup>334</sup> Jonathan Finer, "For Druze Across Middle East, Loyalty Depends on Location," *The Washington Post*, July 25, 2006: A8.

<sup>335</sup> Ettinger. "Can Druze Identity Survive its Neighbors."

community into different orbits. The cultural centers in Israel and Syria inform Druze identity in terms of language, dress, politics, etc. This at least in part explains how the social rift between the two communities has come to into being. The strong nationalist forces in both Israel and Syria threatened to pull these communities further apart, but this is balance by another force, religion. While the Druze are influenced by cultural forces in relation to where they reside they are also influenced by the common experience of being Druze. While national identities have created a schisms in the Druze community it has not obliterated the community altogether. As the gravitational forces of the Druze community increase and counteract those of the national community the importance of nation-identity within the Druze community will become less important.

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## Interviews:

I conducted twelve formal interviews with members of the Druze community living under Israeli rule. The list of those interviewed included City official for on of the Golan Druze villages, three teachers working in the Druze school system in Israel, four Druze merchants working in the Golan Heights, three Druze 'uqqal (religious elite), and four Druze students aged 16 and older. All of these interviews were performed between March 26 and April 30, 2012.