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Still There

Politics, Sectarianism and the Reverberations of War in the Presences and Absences of the Syrian State

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■ **ABSTRACT:** What gets displaced in war, even when people don't move? How does conflict transform and reverberate among those *still there*? And, what can sectarianism tell us about state power in war and in occupation? To answer, we theorize and problematize the relationship of sectarianism to the state, and explore the effects of war and occupation in everyday practice and in socio-economic and political institutions. The cases come from two Syrian Druze regions, from the Israeli-occupied Syrian Golan Height and from Jaramana, Damascus. In the first case, the Israeli occupation shifted the national border, and, in the second case, the war in Syria created new internal borders and checkpoints. Tracing the displacement of conflict through sectarianism allows us to think through state borders, and explore everyday life in relation to economic pressures and geopolitics. It is within these absences and presences of the state that the transformations of conflict and belonging appear.

■ **KEYWORDS:** conflict, displacement, Druze, Golan Heights, Jaramana, sectarianism, State, Syria

Late night in Majdal Shams, occupied Golan Heights, November 2015. I wake up from the sound of gunfire coming over the Syrian border. The sounds of war know no border. They slash through freedom and occupation, war and peace. The war in Syria is so close and so far away. I feel like a voyeur: the sound makes the war intimate, but Israel's occupation, foreclosing any serious spill over, gives a shroud of safety.

[...]

The next day, I hear the sounds of the war again, now in Bahjat's balcony that looks over the fence to Syria, in the company of friends whom I had first met in Damascus in 2009. "He who drinks from the sweet water of Sham . . . he can never forget," Kamel says. I have stumbled across the 'sweet water of Sham' in most of my interviews with Golani (pronounced *Jowlani*) graduates of Damascus University. It is a recurrent trope that arises in conversations about Golani students' experiences of Damascus. They describe their arrival stories in stereotypical fashion: 'like paradise', 'a dream come true.' Salam, Basil, and Dina all tell stories of triumphant reunification between an absent, calling 'motherland,' and her children.

On another balcony, another day, my friend Salman comments: "The sounds of shooting become more frequent at the end of the month. This is when they get their salaries. . . ." (Kastrinou, fieldnotes, November 2015)



Balconies in Majdal Shams, in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, have the double advantage of providing a vantage onto Syria, and a distance, not always safe, from its war. The sounds of war, sonic reverberations, transverse the barbed-wired separation fence; these are the sonic effects of the war in ‘motherland’—as sovereign Syria is referred to. To the 25,000 stateless Syrians in Majdal Shams and the remaining occupied villages of the Golan Heights, the Syrian uprising in 2011 and subsequent war has not dampened their resistance to Israeli occupation and their desire to be part of Syria; resistance and national liberation are *still there*. When they became occupied by Israel in 1967, they stayed *there*, while the border moved. They are still *there* today. They keep powerful connections to people inside Syria, for example, in the Damascus suburb called Jaramana.¹ Between Golan and Jaramana run many bonds: Druze faith, kinship ties, friendships and commerce. Both Jaramana and the villages in the Golan Heights have been and continue to be predominantly Druze communities. Both have been, until recently, agrarian societies, while producers or traders in the Golan Heights would often travel the short distance of 60 kilometers to Damascus in order to sell their produce. With the development of the national Syrian state, in-migration from the Golan to Jaramana took place in order to access the metropolitan job market and civil service, fostering existing kinship and trade connections. The war and occupation of 1967 meant that many families suddenly became separated and ‘fixed’ on either side of the border. Yet, extended families continued to communicate through the radio and through megaphones at the “valley of tears” otherwise known as the “shouting hill” (Dajani et al. 2022: 1–6). People from Jaramana and the Golan Heights continued to intermarry across the borders, such marriages becoming acts of resistance through reaffirming unity even in the face of a new separation as the movement over the border would be permanent (Falah et al. 2017; Pinczuk 2021; Riklis 2004). Students from the Golan Heights would be allowed to study in Damascus University, connecting and fostering familial connections with separated extended family (Kastrinou 2012: 61–65). Recognizing the existing connections between Jaramana and the Golan Heights, Syria and Israel have “allowed” Druze religious leaders from the Golan Heights to make annual pilgrimages to Jaramana (Fakher Eldin 2023: 60). Between Jaramana and the Golan, run many bonds, but why the emphasis on ‘still there’?

In the tradition of creative interpretation and gentle provocation, this article somewhat complicates the current special section’s focus on the displacement of politics through migration. It investigates the displacement of conflict (itself a form of politics) and the various forms of politics that precede, engulf and follow from it. While the other articles ask what gets displaced as people move (and in addition to the people themselves), we ask what gets displaced when people stay put. Hence, while the key question (“what gets displaced?”) is the same, our ethnographic lens shifts, conferring the view from those still *there*, whereby ‘there’ denotes the geography of people and the movement of borders. The cases are the Golan Heights and Jaramana, both Druze communities where, in the first case, the Israeli occupation shifted the national border, and where, in the second case, the war in Syria created new internal borders and checkpoints. We ask: What gets displaced in war, even when people don’t move? How do politics transform and reverberate among those *still there*? How is the relationship between people, politics and states similarly and differently transmuted without the physical movement of bodies? To answer, we trace the changing politics of sectarianism by combining an anthropological approach to everyday practices (Kastrinou 2016: 5–22) with a socio-economic approach to political institutions, such as education, economic infrastructure and healthcare. What gets displaced and at times deferred, even as people stay put, is conflict. Tracing the displacement of conflict through sectarianism allows us to, quite literally, think through state borders—and like Salman’s astute observation regarding salaries and shooting, to explore the very specific empirical realities in dialectical relationship to capitalist economics and geopolitics. By studying sectarianism within

the same sect and not only between sects and communities, we bring out how different political and socio-economic factors shape sectarian ideologies as technologies of state domination, in both 'free' and occupied Syria.

But we use the phrase 'still there' in another way: stillness, unchanged, that which has remained. *Still* there is the Israeli occupation, the Syrian state, political repression, torture and gross economic inequalities and the internal contradictions within the capitalist system that feeds from the antagonisms between maximizing economic profit and accumulation, competing imperialist powers, regionally and globally. We locate Syria as a capitalist state, in a capitalist regional and world order. Here, *still* refers to the structural and systemic conditions that affect the political economy of sectarianism; we concentrate specifically on the capitalist state of Syria and its presences and absences. While sectarianism can and should be interrogated within the global capitalist system, imperialist wars and world order, our ethnographic cases do set the limits of our analysis upon the interrogation of sectarianism in its relation to the political economy of the state. *Still* there are the contradictions, the inequalities, the conflicts, that fostered the need to change in 2011. *Still* there are also the social relations to family and land, reaffirmed and reproduced in ritual and kinship practices that have united people in peace and in war. In this article, we firstly contextualize and theorize sectarianism and the state, before exploring the displacement of conflict among those still there in Jaramana and the Golan Heights.

Druze Connections

This article thinks through sectarianism in relation to the state in two field sites. The comparison is illuminating for several reasons. Firstly, in both places, most of the residents belong to the Druze faith, a non-proselytizing religion with a historical affinity to Ismaili Shia Islam (Farcetek 2021; Kastrinou 2016; Makarem 1974; Nigst 2018), who managed to maintain some degree of autonomous governance during the Ottoman Empire and in the subsequent formation of states in the region (Firro 1999; Lang 2021; Schaebler 2013). The Druze are known as secretive, largely because drawing from the gnostic tradition, their religious community is separated into initiated religious Druze (called *shaykh* or *shaykha*), while the vast majority of believers, about 90 percent of the total population, are laypersons (Khuri 2004). In-sect reincarnation (Bennet 2006; Kastrinou and Layton 2016; Nigst 2019; Oppenheimer 1980) and sect endogamy have served orientalist analyses in popular and some academic descriptions, and although these are important cultural cornerstones of Druze cosmology and ritual practice, they are also historically variable and dialectically related to social and economic factors.² Religious adherence alone does not mean that the Druze form a unified political, social, or economic community. There are significant socio-economic and political internal divisions in any Druze location, as much as there are divisions across national boundaries. For example, they are 'known' for being staunch nationalists and active participants in the national politics of their respective states: leaders of the nationalist rebellion against the French in Syria, as the only Arabs to serve in the Israeli Defence Forces, and as the kingmakers in Lebanon. Although these divisions are not set in stone, it is nevertheless important to consider the formation of the modern capitalist state in the sense that we set out in the following section, as a significant effect on the transformation of (often peasant) communities, their forces of production and their natural resources.

Secondly, both field sites have strong kinship bonds with each other, and historical similarities in their composition and development, especially up until the latter's occupation by Israel in 1967. Both areas were multi-sectarian and demographically mixed. Both were Druze villages in a non-Druze territory (Firro 1994, 1999; Khuri 2004). Both had significant agricultural

and trade relations to Damascus, and both were small peasant societies, internally stratified to a lesser degree than in Mount Lebanon or in the Sweida province. Memories of convivial multi-sectarian relations and a history of providing refuge, are important markers of local social history in both locations, as Annika Rabo (2012) has shown for other parts of Syria. Memories of nationalist struggle against the French Mandate and the historical experience of the Palestinian Nakba form a common collective repertoire (Kastrinou et al. 2021: 641). They have managed to maintain the patterns of intermarriage between the occupied Golan Heights and other Druze in Syria. The experience of university in Damascus for many, meanwhile, has fostered strong emotive connections between Golan, Jaramana, and Syria more broadly. Finally, until the war in Syria, Golan apple farmers were able to sell their apples in the Syrian market.

Thirdly, Jaramana and the Golan Heights have experienced the throes of war, and they have responded in varying ways to the resulting displacement of conflict—as we shall see in their responses to sectarian collective ideologies. Ruthless in different ways, the 50-years of occupation and the 12 years of war in Syria have greatly affected their material socio-economic structures, state institutions, and political actors present. However, the stateless Syrian Druze of the Golan Heights have built their resistance on an explicitly *anti-sectarian* political basis, having defied the sectarian and particularist policies of the occupying force imposed through, among other means, educational curricula (Aun 2023; Tarabieh 1995). Israel's strategy to create dependent and malleable ethnic minorities has been fiercely resisted in the Golan Heights to the degree that local people prefer to be known as 'stateless Syrians' rather than Druze. Demands for freedom from occupation are made on the basis of indigeneity and native belonging to the land, rather than religious freedom (Kastrinou et al. 2021). Despite the war in Syria, they are still demanding their return to the 'motherland,' irrespective of significant internal political divisions between supporting and opposing factions to the current government in Syria (Abu Saleh 2023; Hannon and Russell 2013). Their distance from the actual Syrian *state* has fostered their closeness to the Syrian *nation* (Kastrinou et al. 2021: 649). However, the Druze in Jaramana have gone through an intense process of sectarianization in the period between 2011 and 2016 as a result of the weaponization of local sectarian militia, border conflicts, and military and politico-economic relations of dependency with the central state in Damascus (Kastrinou 2018). Whereas sectarian identity was not a defining characteristic of the area before the war, political and collective identities have since taken a strong sectarian hue. This is not to say that sect was not important before the war; in-sect marriages were not only the 'norm,' but they were sites of struggle upon which gendered and class politics took place, where social and economic boundaries were formed, resisted, punished (Kastrinou 2016: 225). On the intimate bodies of brides and grooms, sect, gender and class were both contested and reproduced, social divisions and hierarchies recast and born again. With the militarization of everyday life, what was once an intimate body boundary, was turned public and explicit. Put in a different way: through the processes of army conscription and the constitution of local Druze militia, the Druze in Jaramana became more outwardly 'Druze' as well as dependent on the Syrian state's security apparatus.

We investigate the present absence and the absent presence of the state among those still there in Jaramana and the Golan Heights, in order to trace the relationship between state and sectarianism, and hence to investigate how conflict gets displaced and deferred among those 'still there.' Studying the 'state' in sectarian mobilizations of identity is crucial here: both Syria and Israel intervene in each (and arguably at both) location/s, even when sovereignty is contested. It is the varying absence and presence of the state in both situations that will help to illuminate our thesis, that sectarian dialectics are inherently connected to the structural machine and ideological manifestation of the modern state. Through the dialectics between sectarianism

and state, we can find the ways that conflict gets displaced, under the rubble of the ‘day after’ but nevertheless still remains.

The State, Sectarianism, and the Anthropologist’s Lens

The war in Syria rekindled the debate on sectarianism in the Middle East, renewing but importantly also going beyond the debate between primordialism and instrumentalism (Abdo 2017; Haddad 2020; Hinneshbush 2018; Mabon 2020; Mabon and Ardoivini 2016; Ali-Dib 2008; Valbjørn 2020, 2021). Anthropology³ is well-fit to study the messy and complex social phenomenon of sectarianism vis-à-vis the state. However dynamic, changing and elusive its make-up might be—its thing-ness—sectarianism (*taifiyya*) is something that our interlocutors *talk* about and *practice*: in marriage decisions and in war, and they sometimes fiercely debate ‘it.’ It is something *constructed* and *reproduced*, whether from war-militia patrolling borders and contested sovereignties or imposed upon through an occupying state’s educational curricula. Finally, sectarianism is something *resisted*: whether from stateless Syrians, or from political opposition persons and parties. Hence the anthropologist’s lens is able to interrogate the different analytical scales of the phenomenon.

We study, therefore, sectarianism as a dialectical social phenomenon with its own history and political economy, which, like kinship and other social phenomena, can help us ethnographically locate, not ‘it,’ but the current fault lines of political and social belonging that are discursively articulated through its contested practices. How has the war in Syria displaced, deferred and reconfigured political conflict, and specifically, what may the study of sectarianism tell us about the formations and transformations of conflict within specific locations and communities? In this direction, we build on our existing anthropological work on sectarianism and the politics of being a Druze in pre-war Syria (Kastrinou 2016), in Jaramana during the early stages of the Syrian war (Kastrinou 2018), and the stateless Syrians in the Golan Heights (Kastrinou et al. 2021). We trace how the vernacular and everyday discourses and practices of sectarianism are always already both political *and* modern. Indeed, sectarianism is both: (1) a practice through which historically specific, especially post-Ottoman, modern collective identities are formed; and (2) a discourse, an ideology that imagines difference and constitutes Others on the basis of eternal religion or ethnic differences (Makdisi 2000, 2019). This understanding of sectarianism combines practices and everyday realities of sectarianism ‘from below,’ with discourse and ideology ‘from above,’ emplacing the phenomenon of sectarianism within the historical formation and politics of modern capitalist states and mass politics (see Gelvin 1998) in the Middle East. This view of sectarianism is not antithetical to nationalism. On the contrary, sectarianism is, like all variations of modern contemporary grand political idioms of belonging, the Janus-face of nationalism (Kastrinou 2016: 21–22).

Anthropologists and others have started to uproot simplistic, and often exceptionalist, assumptions pertaining to the state such as dismantling the dichotomies of strong versus weak or ‘failed’ states (Kosmatopoulos 2011). Recasting the often-asked question ‘*wayn al-dawla?*’ (where is the state?), Mouawad and Baumann critique Weberian and Westphalian analyses that cast the Lebanese state as inherently ‘weak’ for explaining *away* the complex relations between the Lebanese state, civil society, internal and external political actors, as a mere ‘continuation of premodern patrimonial authority’ (2017: 68). The state emerges out of social practice; indeed it is not despite but because of its *opacity* that the state becomes reified and a facet of everyday life (Obeid 2010). This line of inquiry is helpful in locating ‘the state’ in war-torn Syria, where

its omnipotence exists in varying degrees, and sometimes, as we will see, it is even brought to be through its very absence (see Merei et al. 2018).

Sectarianism is never about sects; it is, however, a technology of control through identity that, following Makdisi (2000) and Kastrinou (2016), is intimately connected to the formation of the modern state, in the Middle East and beyond. Appadurai (2006) reminds us that in all modern states, nationalism and liberal democracy are never inclusive or neutral forms of political participation, but inherently built on reproducing an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ dichotomy. This dichotomy constitutes and reifies both majorities and minorities while, as Mamdani (2020) shows, the imperial politics of ‘define and rule’ constituted ‘dangerous’ and ‘in need’ minorities both in colonial spaces and also at the ‘heart’ of modern democracies, indeed *the* modern democracy of the United States. The example of constitution dangerous and ‘in need’ minorities becomes crystal clear through the politics of sectarianism in Israel. In *The untold story of the Golan Heights*, Dajani et al. argue for understanding occupation and Jawlani resistance through the double lens of ‘everyday colonisation’ and ‘the politics of the governed.’ Through the prism of settler colonialism, the first concentrates on the settler colonial processes and effects of “dispossession, segregation and misrecognition bound up with the wider processes of state rule and economic exchange” (2023:6). The “politics of the governed” articulates how “an anti-colonial politics suffuses Jawlani cultural expression is renewed by youth mobilization and solidarity with Palestinians, and also generates a singular political-ecological identity based on the collective defence of land” (ibid.). This work, itself the result of collective co-creation, powerfully demonstrates how the state of Israel has tried through spatial Judaization to create “‘permanent minorities’ of non-Jewish communities, whose indigeneity is at the same time erased” (Dajani et al. 2023: 10). Through collective associations, the arts, cross-cutting networks of resistance, from the historical formative event of the six-month strike in 1982 (Rizqallah 2023) to the more recent resistance to “green energy colonialism” (Mason 2023: 38; Tesdell et al. 2023), the book situates the remarkable forms of resistance that the stateless population has taken.

Amplifying the contexts of this identity-based resistance, a resistance formed around being of the land and hence indigenous as well as being Syrian, the authors problematize indigeneity itself as relating to the settler colonial state: indigeneity is “both defined against and made unstable by settler colonialism” (Mason 2023: 35). This problematization is productive because it allows dissecting a complex, and at times contradictory and “confusing” terrain of resistance and political emotions (Fakher Eldin 2023: 60, 88). In this regard, we follow Fakher Eldin’s definition of indigeneity as “not any notion derived from past ‘authenticity’ but the changing conditions and the ongoing need to build solidarity in the face of continuous fragmentation, denial, and oppression” (Fakher Eldin 2023: 56). In this form, indigeneity appears as an emerging foil to both ethnocentric politics in Israel, and to sectarianism and to the sectarianization of Syria; a foil however, whose efficacy is borne out of the same state technologies and ideologies of control.

Wounds of War: Everyday Life in Jaramana

Jaramana means ‘brave men’ in Aramaic the Jaramana Council (2000) maintains, along with the claim that the town has been as continuously inhabited as Damascus. Firro (1992: 34) mentions that one of the five oldest Druze settlements were in the al-Ghouta—the fertile plains surrounding Damascus that Jaramana is part of. A more specific, fuller historical record emerges from the late nineteenth century on, indicating Jaramana as a majority Druze-majority village with small Christian and Muslim populations.⁴ Geographic proximity to other Muslim villages and to Damascus means that the Druze of Jaramana shared rituals and religious practices with

their neighbors (for an example on following Islamic rather than Druze inheritance laws, see Kastrinou 2014). Jaramana follows the same economic pattern of agrarian reforms and transformations as its surrounding fertile plains of al-Ghouta before and during the Bathist era (Batatu 1999; Hinnibusch 1990). Prior to 2011, Jaramana was a rapidly gentrifying multi-ethnic and multi-religious town-turned-suburb, with more than two hundred thousand inhabitants (informal estimates put that number to five hundred thousand) it had one of the highest population densities in Syria (Fahmi and Jaeger 2009). Located only four kilometers from the capital, Jaramana had become popular with university students and artists, while it was also home to many Iraqi refugees, refugees from the Golan Heights, and adjacent to one of the oldest Palestinian refugee camps in Damascus. In becoming gentrified, with new cafés, restaurants and ‘Western-type’ take-aways, Jaramana was described as “open,” “open-minded,” the “only place in Syria where religious freedom exists” (Kastrinou 2018). However, the failed revolution in Syria, and the subsequent weaponization and sectarianization of the conflict, changed Jaramana. These changes between 2011 and 2016 are detailed in Kastrinou (2018) and briefly summarized here. Many of the Palestinian and Iraqi refugees moved out of Syria, along with locals who could leave to avoid army conscription. Internal refugees and displaced people, initially from the surrounding areas, moved into Jaramana. The Druze neighborhood was initially as divided, as much of Syria was, along political lines with those supporting the regime or the opposition holding competitive demonstrations. During this time, religious shaykhs assumed a new socio-political role as neutral representatives of the community, charged with maintaining social peace. Increasingly from 2012 onward, the neighboring areas of Jaramana were taken over by opposition militia, and checkpoints, along with local militia that controlled them emerged. Political opposition within Jaramana became muted as a result of the security situation (a string of bombs and kidnappings happened in 2012–2013), and the weaponization and co-option of local militia within formal and informal state forces.

It is worse now than during the war. The people . . . you can see it in their eyes, they are hopeless. There are children eating from the rubbish, sleeping in the rubbish. There are so many beggars. There are huge queues to get petrol or bread. The petrol station now has a special app to tell you when to go so that you don't queue for hours.

Raid's voice was tired. It is April 2021. He traveled from Germany to Syria to be with his dying father. The Covid-19 pandemic has struck down hard on Jaramana. Hani, Raid's father, passed away from Covid-19 two days after Raid's arrival, after a series of seemingly banal misdiagnoses: “It's the cold.” “Take some antibiotics.” With a contested and destroyed health system (Dewachi et al. 2021), the lack of capacity and inequality is being laid bare by the pandemic in Syria: no testing capacity, no PPE, no test-and-trace, destroyed hospitals, infrastructure, lack of medical staff (Said 2020: 1–3).

Armed with PPE and lateral flow tests bought in Germany, Raid was now organizing the ‘*usbu*’. The ‘*usbu*’ is a week-long mourning ritual that takes place in Druze communities (Kastrinou 2016). During the mourning week, the body of the deceased travels to the women's and men's *mawqaf* (the Druze mourning space), where it is mourned before finally being laid in the cemetery. Gradually then, the emphasis shifts from the deceased to the communal sharing of pain. For a week, mourners visit the immediate family of the deceased to share the pain. Since the start of the war in Syria, the ritual has somewhat changed: sometimes shorter periods of three-day mourning have to take place, and on many occasions immediate family cannot be present. But the pandemic has not stopped social interactions. While there was an initial stringent lockdown imposed in 2020, people grew increasingly non-compliant with the new measures (Said 2020: 2–4).⁵ In death rituals such as the ‘*usbu*’, social solidarity is both enacted and reaffirmed.

In vain, children who have emigrated, or far-away relatives and friends try to convince and even ‘educate’ those who still live in Jaramana that they must avoid all social contact and that they must stay indoors to protect themselves and others. The response of the people still there is almost always: “God is great. God will provide. If God wishes, we’ll be fine. . . .” This phrase is significant and may be understood in many ways. One reading is that the confluences of a war and a pandemic have given way to religious fatalism and hopelessness. Another way to understand this phrase is as stemming from the geographic vantage of those still *there*. Calling upon the geographic distance, those that have stayed put are as if saying: “You are not here and you have no right to tell us.” Delineated as geographic outsiders, their insistence to instruct social distance, moreover, forms a clear reversal of normative roles in regards to status and age. Put another way, it is considered disrespectful and out of place for young people to be telling their elders what to do. Hence, such instructions were reciprocated through polite but stern refutations, such as, “If God wishes,” *‘Ida allah rad’*. Most often, this sentence would remain unfinished, to be filled with innuendos of either ‘we’ll be fine’ or ‘stop the conversation, you cannot argue with God’. What does this expression mean? Is this an expression of deep weariness, an accumulation of insurmountable pains? Is it what has survived, a ‘bare life’? Or is it an exercise of agency: evoking God and custom, a reminder of a local social order, a pointer of exteriority? As Jaramana enters the post-war era, this narrative points us to an emergent localized commentary that prioritizes an individual, unmediated, relationship with God, a new index in identity marked by deep socio-economic wounds, lack of state institutions and services, and entrenched political fragmentation—these aspects we discuss later. What displacements of conflict can we trace through the dynamics and changes in sectarian forms of political belonging?

“If God Wishes”: Sectarianism, Socio-Economic Hardship and the Absent Presence of the State in Jaramana

Although there is a tendency to view Syrian lives through the lens of the suffering subject, the evocation to God may be understood as an expression of agency (Szanto 2012). Using the unmediated authority of the ultimate judge, this evocation forms a boundary marker between those who are still there and those who are not. This section locates this emerging form of agency, along with the waxing and waning of sectarianism and the state in Jaramana today.

The formal end of the war in Syria was marked by the process of the dissolution of sectarian militia and their incorporation into state structures. The de-sectarianization process of the security situation in Jaramana, ongoing since 2018, did not mean that the Syrian state is present. Although local militia were mostly reincorporated into army and security institutions (al-Labadi 2019),⁶ the state is still absent due to its lack of ability to provide basic services. The Syrian state is an absent presence in Jaramana. It is a presence in people’s everyday lives marked by its absence, such as lack of provisions and services. It is an absent presence that structures everyday life through regular electricity blackouts, and the seemingly endless waiting in queues for petrol and bread. During a telephone conversation, our friend Rabab, exclaims: “Every morning, the queues for bread and fuel are huge. People have to queue for everything, for hours. . . . Meat, milk and olive oil cannot be afforded by poor families anymore. People cannot even afford *maté!*”

Rabab’s commentary encompasses well the economics of contemporary Syria. The Syrian pound (SP) has lost more than 300 percent of its value since the outbreak of the Lebanese crisis in October 2019 on the black market (Said 2020). The Consumer price of food products increased explosively by more than 70 percent since March 2020 (Said 2020). According to the World Food Programme, basic foods to feed a family for a month—such as bread, rice, lentils,

oil and sugar—now cost at least 120,000 SP (ca. 35 US\$) which by far exceeds the average salary (WFP 2021). The non-subsided bread cost 2300 SP (0.65 US\$), while the price of maté, a traditional tea from Latin America that is drunk many times a day in Jaramana, reached, in September 2021, the price of 13500 SP (ca. 3.9 US\$) per kg. Maté is emblematic of the unaffordability of basic foodstuff; indeed maté is an index of normality in Jaramana because it is consumed socially and incessantly. It is drunk with one's close friends and family, not alone, and contrasts to coffee and tea that are offered to all guests. Maté is drunk in a circle, where the host refills one glass that everyone present takes turns drinking from. In terms of commensality, maté infuses and perpetuates social relations. When people cannot afford it, this means that it is difficult to be with one's closest and dearest, one is not able to be a social being. But who is to blame for this change? The reply from the other side of the telephone is serious: "God knows." Unlike the English expression, this saying in Arabic means that God *does* know and presumably he will administer justice sooner or later. No one directly blames the state, especially on the phone. The state is conspicuously present by its absence, an absence that hinges on its inability to provide, and an absence of the ability to voice critique toward a state for which Jaramana's children have either fled from or died defending.

The cracks of the absent presence of the state, especially in state institutions such as health-care, are filled, ironically, by groups and organizations many of whom originally emerged as critical, protesting voices during the early days of protest in 2011. Youth groups, remnants of coordination committees (CCs, in Arabic *Lijan al Tansieq* or *al Tansiqiat*), pre-existing organizations (such as the Red Crescent, and the historical refugee-related infrastructure in Jaramana), and activists are now filling the significant gaps in healthcare, education and food provision. CCs were the first form of organization and coordination. These were responsible for organizing demonstrations, coordinating with CCs in other locations, and providing plans of safe crowd management. They had a political role as organizers and coordinators of the political protest movement. After the withdrawal of the state from many locations, these CCs found themselves taking over functions of the state and operating as quasi-municipalities; for example, in organizing the distribution of aid, coordinating emergency aid, health care provision, repair of electricity and water lines.

In Jaramana, most of CC membership came from the local Druze. These groups tried to provide to both the local population as well as to the internally displaced people (IDP) who now live in Jaramana.⁷ During the pandemic grassroots initiatives emerged by youth groups to help elders, families, refugees, providing them with bread, sanitizers and trying to raise awareness about viruses and the pandemic (Lina 2021; Said 2020). These initiatives are the afterlives of the political youth movement that emerged in 2011–2012 to organize protests and mobilize the street but found themselves overloaded with providing basic services to the growing population in need, either the IDP or the poor in their community.⁸ In doing so, these organizations moved from having a political to an administrative, emergency and service provider role. The absence of the state and the CCs filling that absence, hence, meant that the conflict was not only unsolved but also *still there*. In the process of war and its aftermath, political conflict became displaced and infused into the competing, and sometimes cooperating, administrative infrastructures that emerged.

A new medical center in Jaramana provides limited services mainly for the Druze, while there are doctors who provide their services for free for the people. Some private hospitals provide their services for some families for free through charities. The single public health center in Jaramana is old and can hardly meet the needs of hundreds, let alone those of more than one million inhabitants.⁹ According to Rabab, there is currently a public hospital under construction, which will provide many poor families with health care in the future. But the limited access

to provisions has caused friction between Jaramana's Druze inhabitants and the internally displaced neighbors—challenging the narrative of the neighborhood as 'open-minded Jaramana' and complicating the ideology of sectarianism with the absent presence of the welfare state and its institutions.

The absence of the state and its services in these crucial sectors has opened up a space for the instrumentalization of oppositional forces as service providers. This is a paradoxical, contradictory symbiosis. Many of the Druze men in Jaramana fought in the army, many families have lost loved ones. The same holds true for Jaramana's newcomers, the internally displaced, for many it is anathema to accept aid from liberal Druze *kafer* (unbelievers, derogatory). From the organizations' perspective, their provision support means that energy and effort go into supporting society but not in creating revolutionary change. The greater ideological motif of change, here as elsewhere among Syrians (Al-Khalili 2021) has changed. Yet at the same time, these groups have not been completely 'pacified'. The contradictions, and the opposing political forces lay dormant. In this section we have discussed the relationship between socio-economic structures, the state, and their relation to the waxing and waning of sectarian discourses, showing that the fragmentation in services provision also mirrors the political fragmentation—the fatalism in 'if God wishes'.

The changing political role of religious authority

On March 27, 2021, Jaramana's highest religious leader, Shaykh Jalil Abu Hamoud Fares, passed away. Reportedly, more than five thousand people, most without masks, attended his funeral at the peak of a new wave of the pandemic. Photographs posted on Facebook show a thick crowd of people filling the adjacent street to the *mawqaf*. Around the same time, many of our families and friends became unwell, at this point Raid's father was already ill. The new shaykh of Jaramana, reportedly with hesitance, took up his position. Shaykh Dr Haitham Katbe, belongs to a well-respected traditional family of Jaramana and is himself a medical doctor. He appears to be, in the words of Tawfiq, a young scholar from a religious Druze family, "a humble and quiet modernizer." In September 2021, the Lebanese Amir Talal Arslan along with a highly esteemed delegation of Lebanese Druze shaykhs and his LDP, visited Jaramana in order to pay their respects to the late Shaykh Katbeh. This delegation was part of the first official Lebanese visit to Syria and met with the president and signaled the electricity deal between Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt.¹⁰

The Druze highest religious council in Syria, the *mashaykh al-akl*, have attempted to remain as neutral as possible in the conflict, often juggling a social peace with neighbors alongside ensuring regime protection (al-Lababidi 2019; Kastrinou 2018). The increasing sectarianization of the conflict has affected Jaramana. Since 2013 the voices of political opposition and neutrality have progressively been muted, or imposed over by the power of an alliance between sectarian and nationalist militia; as a result, what used to be a liberal and multicultural Damascene suburb has become more sectarian, and more Druze. This performance of identity, embellished with a newfound fervor for flag-bearing and other paraphernalia associated with national expressions of belonging, is a sectarian result, and not the cause, of the Syrian war.

The assassination of the regime-critical leader of the Druze militia group Men of Dignity, shaykh Bellous, in Sweida in 2015, signaled the broad dissatisfaction with the status quo (Kastrinou 2018). Although this dissatisfaction has not been translated into a united political front, since then the war economy and the continuous failure in the provision of basic services have disenchanted the newly emerged sectarian-military leadership, as well as the state itself. It is in this context that we need to locate the current political stalemate, the vernacular projections of disenchantment and fatalism, the search for an individual connection to the divine, rather than

into state or sectarian politics. On the Facebook page of the Jaramana community, most current posts aim to document and preserve an agricultural past where the connection to the land and its people were defining, and ‘simpler’; a desire to dwell on the sweet melancholy of days past.

After the state’s victory in the rebelled parts of Ghouta, Jaramana became locally known as part of the ‘regime-controlled Ghouta’ and experienced a kind of stability and relative recovery. The neighboring areas were heavily destroyed and unable to initiate a speedy reconstruction process, while most of their inhabitants were displaced, mainly in Jaramana. Many in Jaramana believed in the Syrian state’s narrative that promised a quick and prosperous reconstruction and economic recovery. The conditions were ripe for economic competition and exploitation dressed in sectarian garments. Despite the solidarity from the local community with the refugees from Ghouta, their living conditions were and remain squalid, while many, including kids, have to work in low-paid jobs in Jaramana and beyond in order to survive. As most of the IDP from East Ghouta were Sunni, religious affiliation took on both political and economic characteristics. A new chapter of political *and economic* sectarianization is being written during the current phase of ambivalent normalization. In this, economic and political relations in Syria have become themselves displaced and emplaced in new emerging sectarian identifications.

Sounds of War: Everyday Life in the Golan Heights

The Israeli occupation displaced, forcefully transferred, and affected a total Syrian population of 126,879, destroying 340 villages and farms. After what many locals call ethnic cleansing, only five villages remained inhabited after occupation. In 1981, Israel unilaterally and against international law, annexed the Golan Heights, ‘offering’ citizenship to the stateless indigenous population. Despite such ‘offers’ of citizenship and protection, the stateless Syrians in the Golan Heights collectively and publicly responded by organizing a six-month strike against the occupation. They continue to resist today, and they actively partake in the social and political debates about the future of Syria.¹¹ However, the war has had adverse effects on this Syrian Druze population. Nevertheless, the following fieldwork vignette, continued from the start of the article, is derived from Kastrinou’s 2015 field diaries, and helps illuminate the complex form of belonging and connectedness to Syria.

From Bahjat’s balcony we watch the moon that, like a piece of watermelon, is hanging in the sky. But on the other side of Mount Hermon different sounds break the night.

“Can you tell what kinds of weapons these are from the sound?” I ask awkwardly.

“I am not sure, maybe tanks, but I have no experience,” says Kamel almost apologetically, and Rami adds: “no, these are heavy weapons, individuals use them, not tanks.” Bahjat smokes the nargileh. He does not say much, he just smokes a lot. He looks into the night, there are two lights on the houses on the other side. The flickering lights of a car approach the houses and then all the lights turn off. We look at each other but say nothing. I notice, then, how Bahjat has changed: he is still sweet and warm, but he is also melancholic.

“How long since you spoke to *bayt haltak*?” he asks Rami.

“One, oh no no, three months!” Rami responds.

“I cannot talk to them very often,” Bahjat confesses. “When we speak on the phone. . . *heke*. . . I stay uncomfortable [*be dal mis mourtah*] for a couple of days.”

Bahjat tells of how he cried when he returned from his Dentistry studies in Damascus University. He adds that he tries not to think of Syria and Damascus. “We grew up with songs from

the homeland, we grew up with the idea and the feeling of Syria and Damascus,” adds Kamel. “The strike, the shouting hill, were all in *this* neighborhood.”

Kamel refers to the 1982 six-month strike when the occupied villages of the Golan Heights rose up against Israel’s unilateral and illegal annexation of their land. At the time Israel offered citizenship to the stateless population, which they vehemently rejected. During this time, society self-organized in a number of collectivities and small co-ops. Their resistance forged strong solidarity bonds with the Palestinian liberation struggle. The strike of 1982 is a foundational-myth for this community. The shouting hill is an elevation near the border where relatives from both sides of Syria would meet and speak through megaphones before the wide availability of mobile phones.

Kamel studied English Literature at Damascus University, he now works as an English teacher at a private school. He has a young wife and a sweet one-year old daughter. His newly built house overlooks the separation border into Syria. Inside, the decor of the house is modern, newly furnished in cool gray tones. In the kitchen sink there is a separate tap with ‘water from Damascus’: the tap connects to a preoccupation Syrian water infrastructure. When Kamel was re-building his house, he chose to keep the old tap; in fact, many houses still maintain and use it. The water carries important religious and social connotations. Druze shrines and places of worship always have a running tap with a cup that any passerby can drink from and quench their thirst. People believe that you cannot get ill from this water; on the contrary, the water from shrines is a cosmic blessing as it offers *baraka* to those who drink from it (*baraka*, cosmic blessing, see Fartacek 2012; Farcatek and Nigst 2017). Al Khodr (St George), one of the most revered Druze holy men, is known for killing the dragon that guarded a water well and did not let people drink. The underground connection that the water provides is translucent and powerful, a religious connection through a nationalist infrastructure. Is the water a translucent antidote to the sound of war? Does the water from Syria vibrate with the sonic violence of war?

Back on the balcony, after a short pause Bahjat continues: “The only thing that Bashar cares about is to stay. He does not care for the people.”

“No, not one of the international players cares for the Syrians,” Rami agrees. No one speaks for some time after. We look at the darkness in the mountain.

Rami is a tall, big man, he is sensitive and shy. He was studying architecture when the first protests started—he joined the student protest movement that was calling for change in Syria. But he was arrested and interrogated by the Syrian state security forces. When he went back to the Golan Heights for the summer holidays, he was not permitted entrance back to Syria to continue his degree; he would have entered the final year. Along with his degree in Syria, Rami also left behind the girl he loves. His love had not changed after three years apart, he declared to me. She had fled Syria, eventually making it to Sweden with her younger siblings. They still exchange texts, but she has told him that she is engaged and that he should forget her. Rami is certain that she loves him still. He thinks that even if she gets married to another man it will be because of protection and not love. He is determined to find her, and at the time he was working multiple jobs to save money. He did not care if Druze society doesn’t accept his decisions on love nor protest, he did not regret either his falling in love with a Muslim woman nor participating in the protest movement that cost him his degree.

Sonic Connections: Anti-Sectarian Mobilizations on Barbed Wires

Bahjat, Kamel, Rami, all have strong, complex connections to Syria. Kinship, water, and love—these are all new transformations and continuities of the familial, liberational and nationalist

bases of resistance that has defined the stateless Syrians of the Golan Heights since their occupation began. For them, and for those who have tasted the ‘sweet water of Damascus,’ Syria is both a longing and a belonging, a possibility, and a struggle—and to them, certainly, Syria is not only ‘the state’ of Syria. For them, Syria is a past and a future: a nation that they collectively imagine and belong to. Syria, to them, is not the Ba’th party, is not the civil war; Syria to them was the protest movement, a future freedom, their university friends and lovers, the aunts and uncles and cousins in Jaramana, their studies, and the Christian quarter of the old city in which they used to drink, talk and sing. ‘Their’ Syria is under attack from the great powers beyond its borders, from its neighbors, from militia. The complexity of the geopolitical situation is not lost among those who support nor those who oppose the government. And while the everyday lives of the three 30-something dentist, teacher, and worker are seemingly banal, working and caring for their young families, their everyday lives are also always already intertwined with the habitus of resisting occupation through a continuous emotional affective entanglement to Syria. Their entanglements take many forms: material and immaterial, an emotional connection and narrative, a discourse through which the self and the collective are mediated. Syria is a country, motherland, heritage, something that one embodies and carries. Syria is past and future: “We will always be Syrian, even if Syria doesn’t exist”—the words of an older Golani man ricochet on the barbed wires. In the present, to be Syrian is to practice anti-sectarian political mobilization against the Israeli occupation. It is an emplacement: a connection to land and landscape that has contributed to a political ontology of the land (Mason and Dajani 2019) and to statelessness (Kastrinou et al. 2020). Their distance from the realms of the state in Syria, has fostered their connection to, and, in a sense, construction of, the Syrian *nation*.

The barbed wires that separate Syria from the occupied Golan Heights do not stop the ties that bind the Golan to Syria, as they cannot stop the sounds of the Syrian war at the border. Syria has always imbued the Golan Heights through a sonic presence, and an affective sonic resistance: through recorded radio broadcasts, through the shouting hill, where relatives would speak across the border with megaphones, and where national chants would be exchanged during the celebrations of Syrian Independence Day every 17th of April. Sonic reverberations of war and the nation create affective and trespassing connections (Schäfers 2019). Yet, the soundscape of Syria is also a distance: a safe distance. While the sounds of war pass through the wires, gun shots, shrapnel and bombs—the materials that create the sounds—rarely come through. The war makes Syria sonically present, without embodying the wound, the violence. This Syrian state, through its present absence, is similar to the war. It exists in negation: the state is present by being stateless, and it is the stateless that evoke and embody a nationalist, cooperative vision of a state. This negation is not part of a negative methodology, but similar to what Navaro (2020) describes from the Palestinian ethnographic landscape, this is a productive synthesis and, for this, an affirmative one. The Israeli occupation has been unable to completely dispossess the locals of their land, and the stateless Syrians have worked collectively, in establishing agricultural and healthcare co-ops for example, in order to maintain some economic and cultural autonomy from the occupying state.

The four occupied Syrian villages have continued their resistance to Israel despite ongoing persecution, imprisonment, land dispossession of private and common land, expropriations, restrictions, appropriations (i.e., environmental) unequal exploitation of natural resources, stifling local economic activities, family separations, using civilians as human shields and planting of landmines. Their resistance has been multifaceted: from striking, to developing a cooperative ecology, to resisting the Israeli sectarian propaganda. Their statelessness has offered them a vantage point from the state, a space of ideological freedom (Kastrinou et al. 2020). They offer a modern-day emancipatory example of what Scott (2010) calls “the art of not being gov-

erned.” Not only have the stateless of the Golan fought occupation, but they have also established socio-economic cooperative connections without a discreet or hierarchical leadership. Religious authority is respected but has no everyday political function, while the Israeli-appointed mayor is one of very few who accepted Israeli citizenship and were excommunicated by the Druze shaykhs and village community. Israel tried to ‘democratize’ and normalize the Israeli status of the occupied Golan Heights by holding local elections in 2018—these were boycotted. Political membership to Syrian parties is very limited (and largely historical) and so is participation in Palestinian political parties, although there are strong solidarity ties. In this way, ‘political actors’ in the Golan Heights are almost always external and often, like Israel, Bashar or the ‘big powers,’ malicious.

Despite the social, political and historical kinship and affective connection to Syria, the war has left deep scars and uncertainty over the future. The internal divisions between pro-regime and pro-opposition forces played out in the Golan Heights (albeit slightly delayed) as they did in Jaramana, and all over Syria. However, because of the prolonged resistance that has been built against a sectarian Israeli propaganda, the sectarianisation that has resulted in some areas of Syria has not been able to take root in the Golan Heights. Ironically, the absence of an operating sovereign state and the active resistance to occupation has meant that the stateless Syrians in the Golan Heights are, perhaps, the most nationalist community of Syria today.

Conflict Displaced: Sectarianism in the Presences and Absences of the State

Having laid out the political contexts in both Syria and Israel, it becomes clear that sectarianism is a complex socio-political phenomenon, and one that is inherently connected with the presence or absence of a state. It also becomes clear that the conflict has displaced and transformed the meanings and everyday realities of sectarianism, while at the same time the phenomenon of sectarianism serves to displace, disguise and defer the lingering inequalities and ideological conflicts that pre-existed the Syrian war and were further fostered by it. In both the Golan and in Jaramana the conflicts on the battlefield have largely subsided, but they have reconfigured the discourses and practices of sectarian identification—variously—as acts of resistance, particularism or enmity. At the same time, however, these reconfigurations are always framed within, against and through the States of Israel and Syria in their absences and presences. We have thus traced how and why sectarian practices and socio-material realities have transformed as a result of war while maintaining that sectarianism, as an ideological phenomenon, persists in spite of, and indeed because of, the apparent invisibility of the State.

The stateless Druze of the Golan Heights differ from both Druze in Israel and their compatriots in Syria. On one hand, they have fiercely rejected Israeli citizenship as well as the Israeli propaganda of Druze particularism. When Israel unilaterally annexed Golan, they responded with a successful six-month strike that strengthened their resolve to refuse Israeli citizenship and to remain stateless, and has since sustained political non-sectarian resistance (Kastrinou et al. 2021). On the other hand, the sectarianization of identities as a result of the current war in Syria has not made them more Druze and less Syrian. While political opinion on the Syrian war and its future is divided, they have remained steadfast in their assertion of Syrian-ness (Kastrinou et al. 2021).

The formation of sectarianism as a political identity of belonging in both Syria and Israel has been a crucial strategy “from above”. The war in Syria has eroded the previously cosmopolitan state narrative that manipulated a de-politicized form of cultural heterogeneity in order to establish itself as the guarantor of harmony and social peace; the Syrian state used an

imperial sectarianism rather than ‘nationalist’ ideology that emphasizes state-sanctioned difference rather than national homogeneity (Kastrinou 2016). The war has led, however, toward a new sectarianization of political identities (Kastrinou 2018), ushered in novel forms of populist struggle (Proudfoot 2017), and marked a new era of proxy conflict and define, divide and rule.

In both the Golan Heights and in Jaramana, state intervention and conflict have affected the material socio-economic structures, state institutions, and political actors but in different ways. In Jaramana, the 10-year war and the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic have served to underline the absent presence of the Syrian state; its inability to provide basic healthcare functions and services has led to a popular disenchantment as well as the emergence of critical political actors as service providers. Neither the state nor religious political actors, and not the local militia, seem to be able to address the social, political, and economic needs of the people in Jaramana. But in the rubble of a destroyed economy and a present absent state, there are voices that are being raised, battles for care and provision that continue to be fought. In the Golan Heights, where resistance and political mobilization have always been anti-sectarian, the vernacular legacy of struggle is different. Through the 1982 strike, solidarity with the Palestinian struggle, but also importantly through embodied forms of cooperation, there is the experience of joint struggle, rather than ‘self-preservation’. Agricultural and health cooperatives paved the way for a sustainable self-government, whereas the connections that they forged to Syria, sonically and embodied, were connections that, in some limited sense, were not mediated by a state.

Moving across the barbed wires of war and occupation, like the sounds of shots, reverberating across balconies and ricocheting from mourning spaces, in this article we have explored the displacement of conflict by tracing the dialectical relationship between sectarianism and the state. Within the absences and presences of the state, the war, the occupation, and people are still there.

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■ NOTES

1. Jaramana is a suburb in Damascus, as well as the ethnographic field site of Kastrinou's work. For a history of Jaramana, its historical development and the transformation of the Druze ethnographic make up, see Kastrinou 2014. For an in-depth analysis of how the first years of war affected the neighborhood and those living there, see Kastrinou 2018.
2. For example, Lebanese Druze elites define as much as they *defy* sect endogamy in their non-sectarian but class-based marriage patterns. See Kastrinou 2016: 118–129 for a discussion on endogamy, and Kastrinou and Layton 2016 for the politics of reincarnation.
3. For anthropological reflections on locating sectarianism anthropologically see Salamandra 2013; Kastrinou 2016: 5–22; for ethnographic accounts see Akdedian 2019 and Fibiger 2020.
4. For a history of Jaramana, see Kastrinou 2014.
5. Rules on social distancing were respected in the rich neighborhoods more than in the poor districts. In addition, informal cleaners and porters took the risk and kept working despite the lockdown (Interview I 2020 and Interview III 2020). The poor have a greater fear of dying due to hunger than due to the virus (Hamo 2020 in Said 2020).
6. The paramilitary groups that took form in the early years of the war and become weaponized and the de facto security forces of the area started their reincorporation in the national military structure since 2018, when Syrian Army forces took over Yarmouk and Eastern Ghouta. With the state's takeover of Ghouta, Jaramana stopped being in the frontline. This process of re-nationalizing the many militia groups back into the national army has not been smooth and has suffered delays. This process was especially affected by the horrific terrorist attack by IS in Sweida province in July 2018, killing 258 people, and abducting women and children.
7. Many are internally displaced people from the embattled regions of Syria, many, also, come from neighbouring areas (such as Mleiha and ,Aqraba) where local Muslims had joined forces with the Free Syrian army or Islamic groups (Jubhat al-Nursa, etc.).
8. In the time of socio-economic hardship in Syria, especially after the escalation of the economic and financial crisis starting in October 2019, protest movements across Syria have taken a socio-economic character in opposition to a sectarian or religious one. For example, see the movement '*Bedna N3ies*' (we want to live in dignity) (Enab Baladi 2020). The demands of protesters range from improving the

socio-economic situation and the right for protesting, to the demand for 'Regime Change', without any sectarian feature. Under the same slogans, a protest movement appeared in Lattakia. In Sweida another protest movement appeared in 2015/2016 under the name "Hatamtona", you destroyed us (for more information see Ezzi 2020 and Al Khatieb 2017).

9. There are no accurate formal statistics of the populations of Jaramana. According to a local online newspaper, *Al Azmena*, the estimated population exceeded one million, while it is 165,000 based on the date of civil registration. See Al Azmena (2017), Jaramana's Population is 114,000 in the documents and more than one million in reality (in Arabic), available at: https://www.alazmena.com/?page=show_det&category_id=4&id=159843&lang=ar (accessed October 15, 2021).
10. See <https://npasyria.com/en/64371/> and <http://sana.sy/en/?p=247987>, accessed 23/06/2023.
11. Due to its geographic proximity to both Syria and Lebanon, and especially the strong trade and kinship relations with Jaramana and Damascus, the Druze families in the Golan Heights had, and still have, strong ties with Syria, rather than the Druze communities in Israel. The stateless Druze in the Golan Heights still prioritize their Syrian relationships and many choose to migrate to Syria in order to marry, or for a Syrian bride or groom to migrate in the Golan Heights. Through cross-border marriage, they maintain strong kinship ties with Syria and hence their historical identity connection, while keeping their separateness from the Druze minority in Israel. The religious leadership of that Druze community were among the first Arabs in Palestine to accept Israeli citizenship in 1948. Israeli Druze, because of their relationship to the Israeli state, are often described as 'the only Arabs to be trusted by Israel, and they serve in IDF (Firro 1999; Hajjar 2000; Kannaneh 2008; Radwan 2018). On the invention and manipulation of a particularist identity and alliance by the state of Israel, see Firro 2001, Hazran 2020, Khaizran 2020.

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