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REINCARNATION, MARRIAGE, AND MEMORY:
NEGOTIATING SECTARIAN IDENTITY AMONG THE DRUZE OF SYRIA

by

Marjorie Anne Bennett

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY
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1999
As members of the Final Examination Committee, we certify that we have read the dissertation prepared by Marjorie Anne Bennett entitled Reincarnation, Marriage, and Memory: Negotiating Sectarian Identity Among the Druze of Syria and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Final approval and acceptance of this dissertation is contingent upon the candidate's submission of the final copy of the dissertation to the Graduate College.

I hereby certify that I have read this dissertation prepared under my direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement.

Dissertation Director  Ellen B. Basso
STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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SIGNED: Mayone Anne Bennett
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is based on twenty-one months of ethnographic fieldwork in Damascus and Suwyada, Syria. Research focused on the Druze religious sect. The central focus is on a religious minority's strategies for preserving their sense of separateness and uniqueness while at the same time claiming pan-Arab and patriotic Syrian affiliations. Three broad topics are used to discuss this: reincarnation, marriage, and memory. Because the primary focus is on a religious minority, one of the major concerns has been to elucidate notions of relational identity from a Druze point of view. This dissertation is an argument against any kind of facilely labeled Druze identity, and is an extended discussion of various facets of Druze experience, on what it means to be a member of a religious minority in the contemporary Middle Eastern state of Syria in the mid-1990s. Identity might be best understood as affiliations and affinities, multiply interacting levels of meaning, and a question of frequently adjusting focus and perspective.

Reincarnation is not usually associated with Islam, and the Druze belief in reincarnation is one thing that sets this sect apart from the Sunni majority in Syria, even stigmatizes them. This dissertation also explores the nature of the everyday lived experience of Druze
reincarnation, and how it is a point of cohesion for the community as a whole, but at the cost of some emotional splintering of individuals selves and families. Reincarnation has concrete social effects on both families and communities. It brings together members of unrelated families who otherwise would never have cause to know one another. Reincarnation also functions doctrinally to support the sect’s prohibition against outmarriage. Outmarriage was perceived to be occurring with increasing frequency among the Druze in the 1990s, and was a hot topic of conversation. This dissertation explores the nature of ideologies being reproduced, as well as challenged and altered, through the debate ongoing in the community regarding marriage and outmarriage.

Both reincarnation and outmarriage are topics that raise the issue of the Druze’s relationship to non-Druze, and relational identity, since they both deal with ideologies of boundary maintenance, and “purity” of sect membership.
CHAPTER ONE: DOING ETHNOGRAPHY IN SYRIA

In Syria people tend to be hesitant to talk freely about sectarian identity and ethnicity, unless they are among familiairs. When these topics arise, indirectness is the rule. Without speaking directly to a stranger about whether they are, for example, Christian, Druze, Sunni, Kurdish, or Palestinian, etc., Syrians are quick to assess much about other peoples' identity and group affiliations by reading their comportment and other bits of key information that offer various kinds of clues. How do they dress? In what neighborhood of Damascus do they live? What is their native village? In what context have they encountered this person? What is their name (patronymic as well as given name)? All of these are common strategies for discerning, without asking directly, another person's ethnic or religious identity. Identity beyond the level of Ba'th Party Syrian citizenship, is a fraught and a somewhat taboo topic. I knew this at an abstract level when I arrived in

1 The Ba'th party "officially propagates an ideology that aims at realising the ideal of a united Arab society with a socialist system. Obviously, therefore, it is reluctant to admit that factors such as sectarianism, regionalism and tribalism, all considered as a negative residue of traditional society which hinders the awakening of a national and socio-economic awareness, have played any role in the struggle for power within the party's ranks .... Ba'histists should strive to banish sectarian, regional, and tribal group feelings". (Van Dam 1996:ix,39)

2 Wedeen (1995:241-242) mentions, for example, that one of Syria's discursive taboos includes speaking explicitly of the 'Alawi nature of the regime, that is, that President Hafez al-Asad comes from a religious minority, not the Sunni majority. Wedeen illustrates, however, that such taboos are gamely subverted in jokes about the regime. In general,
the fall of 1994, but it took me some time to learn how this should translate in terms of presenting myself and describing my research to the people I encountered.

When I applied for Fulbright funding to do dissertation research in Syria, the application materials warned that contemporary social scientific research in Syria was discouraged. It was not forbidden, but it was certainly something one proposed at heightened risk of rejection. The expectation, I was told, was that in-country permission to conduct contemporary social science research would be difficult to attain. Indeed most scholars I encountered in Syria were doing technically less "problematic" research (i.e., historically-focused rather than contemporary). The German and French Institutes were populated mostly with historians, philologists, archaeologists, and a few political scientists. The qualifier that appeared in the Fulbright application materials, coupled with a summer spent in Syria (1993), made it clear to me that any overt focus on religious sects, ethnicity, or identity in Syria had the potential to be a problematic topic in a country where patriotic national identity and Ba'th party membership is meant to override and mute expression of sectarian affiliation.

speaking directly of people's ethnic or religious affiliation is
Yet, despite my focus on social science and a religious sect, my application was accepted. In my first months in Syria I did not have a specific strategy for representing myself and managing the fact that I was doing research focused on a religious minority, a potentially sensitive position. How was I to honestly present myself and describe my research?

**Introductions**

Early on in my fieldwork, while I was still based in Damascus, I was introduced to a Druze woman named Areej (a pseudonym). She was in her early thirties and lived in the largely Druze suburb of Jeremana, south of Damascus, and she worked on the side as a Arabic language tutor. Meeting her was entirely fortuitous¹ and proved infinitely valuable on many levels. She and her family became a second home to me, and she introduced me to several key individuals in Suwayda' where the bulk of my fieldwork took place.

Considering the dynamics I describe above regarding the politics of sectarianism in Ba'th Party Syria, how was I to introduce myself and describe my Druze-focused research as I

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¹ In the Fall of 1994, when I began my fieldwork, I paid a visit to the women who had rented me a room during my previous stay (summer 1993). I met one of their new boarders, a German student, who was a friend and
proceeded with fieldwork? Areej gave me some clues when I saw how she introduced me to other Syrians, Druze and otherwise. In introductions, she would say that I was a "doctor specializing in Suwayda" (see Figure 1). She would not say I was a graduate student in anthropology doing research on the Druze. At first I would remind her in private that I had yet to receive my doctorate, but she well understood that. She was doing what she thought most effective to enhance our position as a team, to enhance as much as possible our social currency.

Besides the issue of obscuring my relative academic status, Areej would also say that I was "specializing in Suwayda". This is an indirect yet clear way of saying that I probably had a special interest in the Druze, but it does not exactly say that. The way she introduced me made people significantly more comfortable than if she had been more

---

4 Suwayda is a mid-sized town and provincial capitol with a population of about 40,000 (1985 figure, 'Ala al-Din et al. 1995:60). The population of the entire Suwayda province is estimated at 200,000 (1981 figure, ibid:58). The town of Suwayda lies 100 km southeast of Damascus, 50 km north of the international border with Jordan, and 100 km east of the contested Golan Heights (see Map 1). Suwayda is the town where much of my fieldwork took place.

5 I would always clarify to people when the opportunity arose that I was doing my doctoral research, and was still a graduate student, not yet a doctora. But I think this distinction regarding my academic status was more keenly felt by me than anyone I encountered during fieldwork. The fact that I seemed genuinely interested in their everyday lives, coupled
Figure 1.1: Areas of Druze Concentration in the Middle East.
(Betts 1988:163)

with the endorsement of having received an academic grant that paid for
literal and said something like "Anne is studying the Druze". Initially this mode of presentation made me feel acutely uncomfortable because I thought she was misrepresenting me, and overstating my credentials. I did not want to be, inadvertently or not, unethical. With time I came to see she was doing what people preferred, presenting myself in a way that enabled them to "read" me well enough to know what I was doing at the most general level. This exchange of information could take place without getting into an uncomfortable discussion about religious minorities, a somewhat taboo topic. It then left the floor open; it became the choice of people I met whether they wanted to know more, or whether the basic introduction was sufficient. Those who were curious to know more were never shy in asking me to explain in more detail the nature of my research. The point I wish to emphasize here is that mentioning the word "Druze" right away would have made most people uncomfortable and nervous, particularly at initial encounters, before some kind of trust had been established. This is in part because Syria is a well-surveilled police state in which the Ba'ath Party ethic of citizenship is

me to be there seemed to be legitimation enough.

6 The three pillars of Syria's authoritarian rule include: (1) fifteen different security and paramilitary forces that monitor one another and Syrian citizens; (2) the military; (3) the Ba'ath Party, the party of absolute majority, and the only party permitted to operate among
meant to override and mute religious affiliation. Thus any overt emphasis on aspects of identity that mark an individual or group as different from the greater collective had the potential to make people uneasy, particularly in situations where there was an unknown entity, such as a foreigner like myself.

Needless to say, there is a context for this sensitivity to topics bearing on sectarianism. President Hafez al-Asad, himself a member of a religious minority (‘Alawi), has ushered in over a quarter-century of heavy-handed stability. Reminders of where I was and who was in charge were omnipresent during the course of my fieldwork, although with distance from Damascus, the density of this imagery decreased somewhat. It is a rare moment in Syria when one's visual field is not occupied with any number of symbols of the Syrian state: Asad's smiling face and waving hand; flags; Ba'ath Party slogans; statues of the president; images of Asad and his sons in stores and peoples' homes, in taxicabs, or in larger than life hanging murals on multi-storied buildings.

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students and inside the armed forces. The heads of the security forces are among Asad's top advisers. And they, like the President, are military officers from the minority 'Alawi sect. (Middle East Watch cited in Wedeen 1995:9)
Asad's success in modeling/implementing a unitary national identity is one that came after centuries of fierce sectarianism in the region.

[The] multiplicity of sects gave rise in Syria to a fierce sectarianism which was exacerbated by the Ottoman system of granting a certain degree of self-government to each recognized religious community or millet and by the intervention of the Western powers during the nineteenth [and twentieth] century. (Khoury 1987:14)

Not only the Ottomans, but also the French during the Mandatory period between the world wars adopted policies that worked to augment the potential for fierce sectarianism already in place in Syria. As a result, the pendulum has swung high in the other direction to offset the sectarianism that was manipulated during four centuries of Ottoman rule. The Syrians have also witnessed sectarianism that turned into a long and bloody civil war in Lebanon, and is determined not to have that happen in their own country.

In my view, the well-surveilled state of Syria, with its fifteen different security and paramilitary forces monitoring one another and its citizens (Wedeen 1995:5), can be likened to a Foucauldian panopticon. This is said with the acknowledgement that, as Foucault pointed out, the disciplines inherent in a panopticon system are nothing particularly exceptional; all states to some degree find ways to manage, know, see, and order their subjects
(Foucault 1980). Nonetheless, Syria impressed me as a place where people were exceedingly careful about their public presentation of self, in order to avoid any suspicion that they might not tow the party line. Behind closed doors, among familiars, political discussions about Syrian, regional, and international politics were lively and frank. Yet regardless of one's views of the regime -- supportive, oppositional, or ambivalent -- displays of patriotism were required and oppositional discourse was not readily tolerated.

In Syria, cult and spectacles regiment bodies, mandate participation, and help create a national narrative that, while it may not be able to cultivate belief, is nevertheless able to clutter public space, thereby specifying the epistemic system through which obedience and resistance are understood by the participants, and accordingly enacted. (Wedeen 1995:7)

Syria was so concerned with "seeing" its population, and preventing the occasion for unmonitored opposition, that it was (as of mid-1999) one of the few countries in the region (along with Iraq) that had not yet permitted Internet access. Cyber-space presents visibility challenges. But

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7 The issue of Internet access is being studied by a committee headed by the son of President Hafez al-Asad, an indication of the matter's sensitivity. In late April, 1999, the "Second Al-Sham International Conference on Information Technology" was held in Damascus. The title of the conference was "Information Technology and Future Challenges in Developing Countries: Needs and Priorities". The conference's concerns were vaguely presented as three-fold: "(1) Identification of information technologies and systems with high impact potential on the socioeconomic development of the targeted societies, (2) Implementation methods of appropriate systems and technologies, (3) Implementation requirements
lest I present too Orwellian of a view, there is also much room for humor, cynicism, and pride in issues related to the regime and the spectacle of patriotism that is enacted there on a daily basis (well-documented in Wedeen 1995).

In time I came to learn that presenting myself as focused on a region, like the Hawran\textsuperscript{8} or Suwayda, and its \textit{a'adat wa taqalid} (customs and traditions), was an acceptable, and indeed preferred, framework of introduction. After some uncomfortable mistakes, and taking cues from patient teachers like my friend Areej, I gradually developed more of a sense of the nuances that guide relational interactions within and among sects in Syria. Janice Boddy describes well how the style of textual presentation in anthropology (or any other discipline, for that matter) bears little resemblance to the gradual and ultimately incomplete nature of learning that takes place during fieldwork:

In writing of her discoveries in the field an ethnographer frequently feels pressed, as I have, to anticipate herself, opening [in her writing] with general conclusions and working backward to particulars. That, of course, is the reverse of how one actively learns an alien ideational system -- to the extent that one can. The novice is first tossed about on waves of seemingly unintelligible events.

\textsuperscript{8} The Hawran refers to all of southern Syria, south of Damascus, particularly the plains west of Suwayda and \textit{Jebel al-Arab} (Mountain of the Arabs) as well as the hilly \textit{Jebel} region itself where many Druze live.
Eventually, she finds a toehold. By unromantic, plodding detective work: tracing blind leads, dogging the flimsiest clues, asking frequent impertinent questions, clearly invading others' privacy, she comes to see a pattern in what earlier struck her as chaos. (Boddy 1989:48)

In my case, even simple introductions were confusing at first. I learned it was best not to be introduced as a social scientist researching the thorny issues surrounding Druze identity in Syria. Rather, it was important in my introductions to broadly state my research interests, which tended to put people at ease. Thus my research was described as focused on wanting to learn about everyday life in Suwayda and its environs, Jebel al-Arab, a province of southern Syria. This description of my research was not mis-representative, although it was not terribly specific. The word “Druze” itself indexed a taboo subject of sorts, given the regime and an ideology that places great value on celebrating Syria as a united Arab socialist society. Focusing on a region was a more acceptable frame of reference with which to present myself. It was clear that some people who did not know me very well assumed that I was interested in quaint countryfolk and an associated array of colorful “folk traditions” (“people of the Hawran” or the “people of Jebel al-Arab”). Many people were convinced that Hawrani folklore was my primary interest. People would tug
on my sleeve at weddings, point at some dancers, and declare enthusiastically to me, "folklore, folklore!".

I learned that this kind of hedging and qualifying is commonplace when it comes to topics that bear on sectarian affiliation. Take, as an example, the title and introduction to a 1985 collection of proverbs from the Suwayda region. The title of the collection, translated as "Proverbs and Popular Expressions from Suwayda, Syria", identifies the subject as purely regional, not tied to any one particular group. Take, for example, the following passage from the introduction:

The people who tell these proverbs -- they are the people of the province of Suwayda [muhafazat al-Suwayda] -- the Mountain of the Arabs [Jebel al-Arab] -- the Mountain of the Hawran [Jebel al-Hawran]. Indeed they are one part of the Arab people -- Syria. And yet the people of this region differ in some of their traditions; their local customs are different in some respects. However, for the most part the people whom we find residing in the region have come there as immigrants from different regions of Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine. Because of this they carry with them some of popular local folklore [from these places]. They have created from all of these sources a local, rich, and varied folklore. ['Abayd 1985:5]

In the paragraph following this, the author became more specific about the identity of the region’s residents. He described a period of internecine clan warfare during the eighteenth century in Lebanon between two Druze families that sparked a wave of immigration to the Suwayda region.
The year 1711 AD was given as the point in which emigrant Druze began to establish a new home in the region. He painted a romantic picture of rural emigrant Druze villagers living among the ruins of past civilizations, "in every village there are columns [i.e., ruins] .... the footsteps of the shepherds returned to the ghost towns. The shepherds placed around the temples and theaters fences for their herds, their vineyards, their naturally fertile gardens, and their large tents of goat hair" (ibid 5-6).

Subsequent waves of immigration were described as having come from Aleppo (Syria's second largest city), Lebanon once again, the environs of Damascus, and Palestine. These later emigrants were identified only as having come from a particular place. Some rivalries were said to have occurred from the mixing of these different waves of emigrants. In the entire introduction the author mentioned group membership only once, when he mentioned the Druze in the aforementioned case of the 1711 inter-clan warfare in Lebanon that drove the first major wave of immigration to the region. Yet all of the subsequent waves he described originated from regions in the Levantine Middle East where Druze populations are known to exist. But that connection is never explicitly drawn out.
Similar hedging of the issue of sectarian affiliation (and, moreover, the tendency to occlude sectarian affiliation by referring instead to regional identity and folkloric associations) was apparent in the January, 1993, issue of the tourism magazine, al-Karnak. This special issue focused on "Suwayda: Pure Culture and Ancient History" (al-Suwayda': Hadhaara Asila wa Tarikh 'Areeq). Al-Karnak magazine was provided "compliments of the Ministry of Tourism". Its advertisers included bus companies and luxury hotels. Figure 2 shows a photograph that appeared twice in this particular issue of the magazine, but with different captions each time. The photograph is a portrait of a young woman wearing a style of traditional dress specific to Druze women⁹. What is interesting about the use of this portrait in al-Karnak are the captions: "face of a young girl, Suwayda" (wajha sabiyya min sabyaan, suwayda), and "folk attire" (zay sha'abi). These captions steer away from the particular and identify her only as a representation of the

---

⁹ The portrait features a tarbouche (gold coin-encircled, fez-like cap) and futa (diaphanous white veil). A tarbouche was traditionally a vehicle for displaying one's bridewealth (the gold coins) during weddings. Some older women still wear a kind of "everyday" tarbouche (without coins) with a futa (veil). But most young women in Suwayda do not wear either, although in the villages most married women do wear a futa (but not a tarbouche).
folklore of a particular place, despite the fact that the traditional clothes she is wearing are specifically Druze.

Figure 1.2: "Face of a Young Girl, Suwayda" (al-Karnak magazine. January 1992, p. 12)
This is a small example of the way one official apparatus of the Syrian state (e.g., the Ministry of Culture) avoids the topic of sectarianism. On the one hand this can be seen as a strategy meant to enhance national unity (and to avoid what has happened in Lebanon). On the other hand, it might be experienced as a way to mute and intimidate those groups who are not closely linked with the ruling party or the religious majority.

"We Are A Tangled and Knotted Society"

At one of the early meetings with my language tutor Areej, I was taught a constellation of phrases whose meaning revolved around various uses of the same triliteral root (‘aqada). Some translations of these phrases include "knotted society", "complicated/unsolvable society", and "snarled idea". Areej, in her blunt and unapologetic manner, was quick to acknowledge the inherent problems, contradictions, double standards, and limitations extant in any society. She readily came up with examples from her own and other societies to illustrate what she incisively saw as the tangled and troubled nature of social life. She was the first Druze individual with whom I became closely acquainted. She also was the kind of person who dove headlong into a discussion of delicate social issues. At
the same time she was very circumspect in the delivery of her critique. Over time, our relationship developed beyond that of merely teacher and student, and what I might call her blunt discretion always impressed me. I learned from her important cues for my own behavior. Moreover, observing her gave me insight into the delicate balance that exists in Syria today regarding management of various levels of identity (national, religious, sectarian, gender, familial). Areej was one of my best teachers when it came to my gaining some understanding of the nature of the knotted and tangled society in which she lived. She taught me through multiple perspectives, through her perspective as a member of the Druze community, as an Arab, a Syrian citizen, and as a woman. It is an interesting if minor coincidence that both Areej and I used fabric metaphors to describe the same social context. In the grants I wrote to fund my dissertation research, I stated that the goal of my research was to consider how the Syrian Druze weave themselves into the complex and diverse social fabric that is contemporary Syria. However the fabric metaphor I used, that of a tightly woven fabric, implied more smooth integration overall than did Areej’s image of a knotted society. In the course of my fieldwork, Areej often reminded me that any social fabric has its knots, tangles, and imperfections,
despite the impression of symmetry and cohesion it gives from a distance. This dissertation is an effort to understand one religious minority's strategies for preserving their sense of separateness and uniqueness while at the same time claiming pan-Arab and patriotic Syrian affiliations. Again, as in the permutations of the fabric metaphor, understanding the various levels of meaning becomes a question of frequently adjusting focus and perspective.

The aim of my discussion here regarding the seemingly simple issue of introductions in the field has been to set up a basic problematic of my research, the fact that the topic of sectarian identity is a sensitive one. As such, this should give an initial, if inchoate, sense of the complexity of being a minority in Syria.

In this dissertation, the focus has revolved around three broad topics: reincarnation, marriage, and memory. My effort has been to offer some perspectives on what it means to be a member of a religious minority in the contemporary Middle Eastern state of Syria in the mid-1990's.
CHAPTER TWO: HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL POSITIONS

Background

The Druze are Arabic-speaking members of a Middle Eastern religious sect that originated in eleventh century Egypt during the Fatimid Caliphate. The Fatimid period (969-1171 AD) was one in which the Isma'ilis, a splinter sect of Shi'a Islam\textsuperscript{10}, enjoyed the seat of governing power and intellectual influence in Egypt. The year 1017 AD is commonly given as the inception of the Druze sect, being linked with the rise of a particular Fatimid imam, Hamza ibn 'Ali. Thus in a rough way, the Druze can be viewed as a sect growing out of a sect of Shi'ite Islam. Shavit points out, however, that Western commentators tend to describe the Druze as an "offshoot" of Shi'a Islam, because outsiders' orientation is more influenced by the controversy surrounding what might be called their Islamic credentials. Whereas Druze themselves tend simply to refer to themselves

\textsuperscript{10} By way of oversimplified but necessary background, the two main divisions in Islam are between those who identify either as Sunni or Shi'a. These designations are as much political as they are religious, because they ultimately are concerned with where the source of legitimate authority lies for the Muslim community. The Shi'ites believe that certain descendants of the Prophet Muhammad's have the right to lead the ummah (community of believers). In their view the ummah is properly governed only by a genealogically-based chain of authority that originates with the Prophet. The Shi'ites make up the second largest Muslim sect, in contrast to the majority Sunnis. The Sunnis hold that the source of authority lies in the recorded practices (i.e., the sunnah) of Muhammad.
as members of an Islamic sect, neither Sunni- nor Shi’a-derived.

Concerning ... how Druzes view their religious origins, it appears that those who are knowledgeable about their doctrine agree that they are an "Islamic sect". (Shavit 1993:11)

During my fieldwork, I was not infrequently told by Druze individuals that "Druze is not a religion, it is a sect of Islam".

Although Egypt is where the sect originated, it is not where Druze reside today. For the most part, Druze communities are located in the modern states of the Levantine Middle East: Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Israel, and Palestine. There are also emigrant populations abroad in various countries including those of the Gulf States, West Africa, and North and South America.

Their faith departs from orthodox Islam in various doctrinal and practical matters, including the belief they hold in reincarnation which is almost unique in Islam. Also, their interpretation of Islam does not require that they perform the five daily prayers that are so much a part of daily life for most Muslims. Such departures from conventional Islam put the Druze in the difficult position of having to prove their Islamic credentials and stress their Muslim affiliation, while also feeling the need to
defend the philosophies and practices in which they take pride.

Theirs was a community that began as a campaign to renew and reform religion within Islam. The Druze and their religious philosophies, as part of Islam's dynamic history, originated under the Isma'illis\textsuperscript{11} during the Fatimid Caliphate. Although firmly rooted in Isma'ilism, the Druze movement strove to incorporate different ideologies that went beyond traditional Isma'ili eschatology (Andary 1994:2). Their esoteric beliefs were thus influenced by many wide-ranging philosophical and religious (monotheistic as well as polytheistic) movements. These ranges of influence include Neoplatonic Greek philosophy, Hindu mysticism, Buddhism, Gnostic Christianity, elements of Persian religion (e.g. Mithraism, Manichaeism, and Zoroasterism), and Sufism (Islamic mysticism). Isma'ilism is thus only one of numerous intellectual and spiritual sources of inspiration which informs Druze religious thought.

\textsuperscript{11} The Isma'illis were a revolutionary Muslim sect that split with mainstream Shi'a Islam in the eighth century AD, less than 150 years after the prophet Mohammed's death (632 AD). The split was due to a difference of opinion over the Imamate (religious leadership). Shi'a Muslims believe that the succession of rule following the prophet is a matter that resides in his lineage, among his descendants. The split between the Isma'illis (seveners) and the mainstream Shi'a (twelvers) is due to differences in opinion regarding how many Imams, or successors to the prophet, there should have been, seven or twelve. The Isma'illis believe the seventh and final Imam was Isma'il al Mubarak (d. 760).
The Druze are sometimes referred to as a "compact religious minority" (e.g., Rabinovich 1979). This phrase refers to a constellation of factors including relative inaccessibility (until recently) in remote mountainous agricultural areas in Lebanon and Syria, the concentration of roughly eighty to ninety percent of a country's Druze in these out of the way areas, religious and social customs distinct from the Sunni-Muslim Arabs and Christians of the surrounding plains and towns, as well as an internal authority system being divided among rival clans prone to intense factionalism.

Politics of Naming

The most common explanation for the origins of the name "Druze" is that it derives from an early prophet in the sect, al-Darazi. But the Druze have other names for themselves. As with many Native American groups, for the Druze there exists a politics of naming in that there are discrepancies between what appellation outsiders tend to use, versus the name by which the group refers to itself.

In familiar, casual contexts the Druze usually call themselves as "Druze" (Durzi, a Druze person). Yet in more formal contexts they tend to refer to themselves as Muwahiddun (translated variously as "Unitarians" or
"Unists"). This term is derived from wahed whose meaning includes the number "one" and the concept of "unity". Shavit (1993) chooses to translate Muwahiddun as Unists, so as not to confuse it with Christian Unitarianism. As Muwahiddun, they seek unity with God, and reincarnation is the path that allows souls the time-depth necessary to get closer and closer to achieving this goal.

In Syria, one can see a politics of naming that reflects the state’s relationship with this religious minority. Up until the 1970’s, when President Hafez al-Asad became president, the region where I did fieldwork was known as Jebel ad-Druz, the mountain of the Druze. But with the ascendancy of Asad and Ba’th Party ideology, artifacts from a past that acknowledged minority groups in the naming of regions were put to rest. In the seventies, the Jebel ad-Druz came to be known officially as Jebel al-Arab, the mountain of the Arabs. Subsequently, maps of the region reflected the new nomenclature. As such, a sub-text can be discerned when someone speaks of the region, will they choose to refer to it as Jebel ad-Druz or Jebel al-Arab? I heard both appellations. Choosing one or the other could be influenced by one’s age, the strength of one’s the party affiliation, how well they knew me, the audience and topic of conversation, and so on.
Again, this regional naming points out the state's efforts to promote inclusiveness, by emphasizing the unity of its citizens by virtue of their Arab "ethnicity", including the Druze's Arab-ness, rather than identifying them by what set them apart, a religious-sectarian identity. Renaming the region was a nation-making strategy of inclusiveness, although perhaps a coercive one.

Tagiyya: Dissimulation

Like the Isma'illis from whom they split in the eleventh century AD, and the Alawi (the Shi'ite sect from which Syria's President Hafez al-Asad hails), the Druze are known to be secretive about their sect's doctrinal knowledge, to the point of advocating religious dissimulation (taqiyya) in order to protect themselves from outsiders who might be inclined to persecute their religious minority.

The term "taqiyya" is translated as dissimulation, but in Arabic, it also has the connotation of prudence or carefulness. Tajiyya, a concept that originated with the Shi'a Muslims means that a member of the faith may outwardly adopt the posture of another faith in order to avoid persecution. Many Islamic minority groups such as the Alawis of Syria and the Isma'ilis have practiced tajiyya throughout history. Originally, tajiyya was a practice employed as a sort of emergency measure to protect an endangered community or individual; they were not simply allowed to pretend to be of another religion frivolously. Also, all religions were not acceptable disguises. As Nejla Abu-Izzedin points out, the Druze were explicitly permitted only to use another form of Islam as a cover for their
identity. Nevertheless, a permitted use of taqiyya evolved that allowed the Druze to help preserve the secrecy of religion vis-a-vis outsiders. (Andary 1994:12)

Taqiyya is often used to explain diverse phenomena. Layish (1982), for example, in his study of Druze family law in Israel, is eager to describe any apparent anomalies between Druze law and practice as taqiyya. He extrapolates that since for centuries many Muslims saw the Druze sect as heretical, the Druze felt compelled to blur distinctions and assume an outward assimilation to the majority. If in various instances Druze customary practice seems more consistent with Shari‘a law (Islamic law) than some specific aspects of Druze family law, taqiyya may be a plausible explanation, but one that can also be overused. Perhaps conforming to a more ostensibly Sunni behavior may have to do with taqiyya — assimilating out of fear of persecution — but just as possible, certain similarities between Druze and Sunni could also be due to the widespread cultural and social continuity that crosses religious, ethnic, and class boundaries in a region where diverse groups have lived close together for millennia. This latter explanation, reminding us of a generalized cultural continuity, should not be left behind in the wake of taqiyya when explaining perceived
anomalies between Druze law and their customary behavior\(^\text{12}\).

It is too easy to explain away too much about the Druze as being due to “religious dissimulation,” emphasizing Druze uniqueness, separateness, secrecy, and difference to a fault, at the expense of acknowledging what is in fact great cultural continuity across the Middle East. At any rate, the attempt to nail down one explanation, *taqiyya*, in various anomalous cases, when there are certainly many contributing factors, perpetuates the notoriety of the Druze’s secrecy and aura of mystery which has been sensationalized by commentators on the Druze for centuries.

Reincarnation

One thing that sets the Druze apart is their belief in reincarnation, something neither the Christian nor Sunni Muslim neighbors share. The importance of reincarnation became increasingly apparent to me the more time I spent doing my fieldwork. Chapter Four of this dissertation focuses on the function and experience of reincarnation in the Druze community. For instance, what kind of meaning does it carry in peoples’ lives, how does it affect their relationship to the past, certain places, to non-kin who

\(^{12}\) And certainly there is the obverse problem of explaining away too much in the name of an overgeneralized “Mediterranean culture area” (e.g. Gilmore:1982).
claim to be reincarnated relatives, and so on? What kind of choices do Druze parents make when it becomes apparent that a child of theirs is struggling with memories from a past life? Why and how do different Druze families struggle with or accept the phenomenon? The phenomenon of reincarnation is not one with which the Druze necessarily have an easy and untroubled relationship. Many Druze told me they did not "believe" in reincarnation, but "respected" it nonetheless as an important aspect of their sect's belief.

**Exclusivity**

In the first quarter century of its existence, the fledgling Druze movement was successfully engaged in missionary activities. In 1043 AD, however, with the end of the da'wa (the "call" to the faith/the missionary period), the efforts at spreading the teachings of their movement came to a halt. At this time, after a particularly intense period of religious persecution, the missionary activity stopped and the tenets of the faith eventually came to be held in secret, available only to a small group of religious initiates. The community closed in on itself. It was decided at this early point in their history not to seek any more members, nor to accept any converts. Thus the Druze sect became an exclusive one; neither seeking converts
through proselytizing, nor accepting converts. This is another practice that is exceptional when compared with the wider Islamic world where the central religious text, the Qur’an, is easily available and free to be debated by any who wish. It must be noted that the Qur’an is considered sacred and central to the Druze, but the Druze have additional texts important to their sect that are not commonly available. This type of off-limits text is not typical of mainstream Islam.

Because of the esoteric nature of Druze religious teachings, and the preoccupation the Druze have had historically with the threat of religious persecution, their foundational texts and teachings became increasingly difficult for any other than a few to access. The *Kitaab al-Hikma* (the Book of Wisdom) is a book that is supposed to be accessible only to Druze who are initiated into the *uqqal*. By no means is it equal in importance to the Qur’an, that would clearly be heresy in Islam. The *Kitaab al-Hikma* is a source of Druze theological and philosophical principles, mostly in the form of epistolary correspondence among the sect’s early leaders. Although occasionally

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13 *Uqqal* can be glossed as “the learned ones” or “religious initiates”. In this context *uqqal* refers to those individuals who have access to the interpretations of certain Druze texts. The *uqqal* comprise less than one-fifth of the community. The remainder of the community is referred
available for perusal, it is said that it cannot be truly understood without knowledge of its esoteric interpretations which are available only to religious initiates (i.e., members of the uqqal).

Andary claims that the division between those who tend to pursue religious initiation and the great majority who do not is reflected more generally in divisions of social class, between the educated elite and ordinary people (Andary 1994:12). Several Druze writers, proud about the egalitarian streak of their sect, make the point that religious initiates can include women as well as men (e.g., Abu-Izzedin 1993:229-230). Strick (1990:113), based on her fieldwork in Druze villages of the Galilee region of northern Israel, reports that after several years of marriage, many wives become religious initiates while few husbands are inclined towards religious initiation. Women thus become the "bearers of morality," as the following excerpt from her dissertation makes clear:

This [religious initiation] gives the wife brief contact with women from most of the Druze families in the village and, more importantly, makes her more closely associated than the husband with the morality and conservative tone of Druze religion. Though women are believed to be by nature morally weaker than men, and thus less capable of spiritual growth, the greater religious participation of wives and the fact that many husbands cannot meet the stringent requirements of to as juhhal ("the uninformed," "the uninitiated"), those not inclined toward a rigorous pursuit of religious philosophy.
initiation quite often means that the wife is seen as more morally pure and religiously knowledgeable than the husband. (ibid)

Other contemporary commentators (Andary 1994; Layish 1982) would take issue with Strick, claiming that in practice very few Druze women pursue religious initiation. Consensus eludes^{14}.

Population

Fatimid Cairo (eleventh century AD) was the time and place where the Druze sect originated, but Egypt it is not were Druze reside today. Religious persecutions and changing political climates, coupled with a particularly successful early missionizing campaign in Greater Syria, forced an exodus to various remote mountainous regions in the Levantine Middle East where most Druze populations have remained ever since. Druze populations are currently concentrated in the Levantine Middle East: in Lebanon, Syria, Israel, and Jordan. It is believed that they are most populous in Syria, at 200,000 (+/- 30,000) comprising roughly three percent of the population. In Syria, the Druze population is concentrated for the most part in the Jebel al-Arab region of Muhafazat al-Suweida one hundred

^{14} This was not something I focused on in my research. As such, I cannot venture an opinion on whether few or many Druze women pursue religious initiation.
kilometers southeast of Damascus. Populations also exist in the large cities of Damascus and Aleppo. Lebanon contains the second largest concentration of Druze with population estimates ranging from 130,000 to 200,000 (Strick 1990), comprising six percent of that country's population. In Israel the Druze comprise just one percent of that country's population. They are least populous in Jordan, comprising about one percent of Jordan's population. The Jordanian Druze are often overlooked altogether in works focussing on the Druze (e.g. Strick 1990), although they do have a historical presence there. Most Jordanian Druze are understood to be the descendants of those who fled from what is now Syria and Lebanon during tumultuous political and economic times. Many, for example, sought refuge during the Great Syrian Revolt in the 1920s as well as during numerous other conflicts that occurred during Ottoman times, before the Mandatory period. The Jordanian Druze are concentrated in the desert oasis town of Azraq, but there are also Druze communities in the northeastern suburbs of Amman, including Zarqa.

Although the majority of Druze live in rural villages, there is considerable movement between villages and the regional urban hubs of Beirut, Damascus, Amman, Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem. There are also a considerable number of
Druze who work most of their adult life outside of the Middle East, in Venezuela, Argentina, Nigeria, Australia, and the United States. It is said to be common that those who do work abroad return to their village to live out the last part of their lives. In the Jebel al-Arab region of Syria, where approximately eighty percent of Syria's Druze reside, I have met several Druze families whose first language is Spanish, and many who are comfortably bilingual in Arabic and Spanish\textsuperscript{15}.

**Islamic-ness**

In their reformulation of Islam, some Muslims think the Druze have departed too far from mainstream Islam. The Druze essentially shunned a literal understanding of the traditional five pillars of Islam, for example, in favor of a more metaphorical and esoteric interpretation of living one's life as a good Muslim. The religious practices of adherents of the Druze sect are, as a result, largely stripped of ritual performative aspects\textsuperscript{16}, particularly in

\textsuperscript{15}There is a strong economic link between the Middle East and Venezuela/Argentina. Besides nearly a century-long relationship in which labor has been exported to South America, some material culture has also been travelling across the transatlantic divide. The Argentinean tea, mate, is as popular as coffee and tea among the Druze, Christian, and Alawis of Syria (a different brand of imported mate is associated with each of the three groups). During my fieldwork, many hours were spent sipping mate with Druze friends and acquaintances.

\textsuperscript{16}For a discussion of the issue of religious ritual among the Druze see Intisar Azzam's forthcoming chapter in the International Druze Society's
comparison with their Muslim and Christian neighbors. As a consequence of the various ways in which Druze practice differs from more mainstream Islamic practice, it has not been uncommon for a fatwa (religious/legal decrees; fatwa, sing.) to be pronounced against the Druze from conservative clerics in Egypt and Saudi Arabia declaring them heretics or infidels.

There is thus a continuing debate that goes on within as well as outside of the Druze community regarding whether or not the Druze are Muslims. Andary (1994:3) discusses the dilemmas inherent upon Druze as they consider whether they are an independent religion or a sect that is part of the greater religion of Islam. Choosing the latter, he adds, is problematic because even today most Muslim scholars tend to consider the Druze a fringe or marginal group, and some Islamic scholars from the revered Al-Azhar in Cairo have referred to them as heretics, stating emphatically that they published proceedings of their first international conference (1999, anticipated publication date).

"Although the sect is described as being largely stripped of ritual performative aspects, the Lebanese and Syrian hills in which many Druze live are scattered with popular Druze shrines to saints and prophets that are frequently visited in the summer months. This, however, is a problematic example because pilgrimages to local shrines are not considered an element of orthodox Islamic practice in general, and is often deplored by clerics as bordering on idolatry. In a more orthodox vein, however, Druze will read appropriate passages from the Qur’an at important occasions such as weddings and funerals. Their adherence to this practice, however, is looked at with distrust by some as a manifestation of Druze taqiyya (permissible dissimulation), or the parroting of Muslim practice as a stopgap measure to avoid religious persecution."
are not a part of Islam. Most Druze I spoke with considered
themselves to be members of a sect of Islam. Sometimes, in
order to make a particular point, they referred to
themselves as Muslims rather than as members of a sect. How
one self-identifies, whether as Druze or Muslim, depends
upon the context of discussion, and who the audience is.

The question of their Islamic-ness is a sensitive one.
The threat of censure from religious decrees/opinions
(fatawa) raises the specter of religious persecution. Every
few years, when a fatwa is issued, Druze sheikhs will
typically offer a response in which an explanation is
offered of why the Druze are indeed Muslims. Besides
wanting to thwart any potential social or religious
divisiveness, being accused of heresy also can be
experienced as a humiliating repudiation of one's sense of
piety and religiosity. However there is no unified view
necessarily on where the Druze do or do not fit within
Islam, which in part is exacerbated by their secrecy,

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I knew a young woman who had the opportunity to go to the United
States with a group of young students from various Arab countries as a
representative of Syria in the mid-1990s. She found herself a little
exasperated about having to explain both to her American hosts and her
Arab peers who she was as a Druze. Because the categorization "Druze"
was too obscure for the program organizers, she was categorized by the
sponsoring organization as "Muslim". At each stop she had to explain to
her hosts that yes she was Muslim, but from a sect of Islam, one with
different prohibitions. For example, she could eat pork and drink
alcohol. To many of her Arab counterparts outside the Levant, she had
to explain who the Druze were in the first place, and that she indeed
was a Muslim, not just part of some heretical fringe group.
marriage practices, and other things that set them apart. The effort by Druze sheikhs to affirm their Islamic credentials could partially be an attempt to thwart persecution. At the same time, it could have nothing to do with that. Some Druze told me they considered the sect truly apart, but they were in the minority among those whom I encountered. Part of this dissertation examines what it is that perpetuates a sense of Druze separateness, as well as where regional and other affiliations override sectarian loyalties and perspectives.

The Druze are constantly challenged to defend themselves as members of a sect that is poorly understood in their own country, while also being pressured to demonstrate a greater allegiance to Syria and pan-Arab concerns. Many Druze feel it is more ethical to identify with wider Arab and Islamic causes, rather than to bring attention to themselves as a splinter group with special concerns. It was explained to me that the spirit of a monotheistic faith is more sincerely carried out by considering all Muslims, Christians, and Jews as brothers rather than “others”, and that maintaining an attitude of being a sect apart was thus contrary to religious values that form the foundation of their religious practice. It was also frequently emphasized that identifying the Druze as a sect apart from other
Muslims was the effect of many centuries of colonialist efforts (Ottoman, French, British) aimed precisely at encouraging and aggravating divisiveness within the Arab world. At the same time many in the Druze community feel deep resentment regarding a not uncommon Muslim view that the Druze are superstitious heretics, and therefore not true Muslims. There thus exists an uncomfortable interplay for many Druze between identifying with broader religious and nationalistic causes, while at the same time wanting to maintain pride in their own community and philosophical principles as something special that sets them apart.

Perhaps one of the more pressing reasons the Islamic credentials of the Druze are sometimes questioned has to do with the way they interpret the pillars of Islam. These pillars are foundational, particularly in Sunni Islam; Muslims are expected to adhere to them to the extent that they are able, physically and financially. But the Druze

19In general, the French strategy concerning the Druze was one of “isolating the Jabal Druze from Damascus and of creating a direct and special relationship with the Druze leadership .... Indeed, the French had allowed the Druzes a large degree of autonomy over local administrative matters” in the early 1920s. Within the Druze community there were, of course, varying allegiances, some favoring French as well as British presence and their claims to create an autonomous Druze region, versus Druze rebel leaders who were against the French and British presence and influence altogether, favoring instead the creed of Syrian unity preached by the nationalist elite in the capital of Damascus. (Khoury 1987:155, 164)

20There are five pillars of faith for the Sunni Muslims (bearing witness/shahada, fasting/sawm, almsgiving/zakat, Mecca pilgrimage/hajj, and the call to prayer/salat). The Druze, however, describe seven principles/ordinances (according to Shavit 1993).
long ago took a metaphorical/allegorical interpretation of
the Qur'an.

... The Druze faith considered the seven pillars of
Islam as rituals meant only for those who accept
literally the outward meanings of the Qur'anic verses,
and as such they abandoned them: each pillar instead
was interpreted allegorically as a spiritual experience
of the unitarian believer and no longer as an outward
practice of rites. Instead of the seven ritual pillars
(da'a'im taklifiyya), the Druze faith imposed seven
unitarian principles. (Firro 1992:12-13)

For ease of comparison, a table enumerating the pillars of
Islam, as well as the Druze interpretation of each pillar,
is provided below. This table, it must be noted, is based
on information primarily related to the Druze. It
illustrates the nature of their metaphorical interpretation
of some religious principles; it should not be seen as a
source explicative of Islamic religious philosophy in
general (five pillars versus seven pillars, etc.).

Table 2.1: Comparison of Pillars of Islam with Druze
Interpretation of Pillars of Islam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pillars of Islam</th>
<th>Druze Interpretation of Pillars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>salat / prayer, worship.</td>
<td>sidq al-lisan/truthfulness. Central, most important principle/duty of Druze doctrine. The more pure the soul is, the better able it is to reflect Divine Light.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ritual act of performing the call to prayer five times a day, facing Mecca, with brief Quranic recitations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zakat / almsgiving, charity.</td>
<td>hifz al-ikhwan/ Brotherliness, mutual aid. Safeguarding of fellow believers selflessly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Muslims must pay a specified share of their</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>income or property to help provide for the needy.</strong></td>
<td>Support and assistance to fellow believers on all levels with pure hearts, without rules, regulations, or selfish inclinations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>sawm / fasting.</strong> Abstinence from food, drink, smoking, and sexual intercourse between sunrise and sunset every day during the holy month of Ramadan. This discipline is meant to teach the rich what it is like to be poor, to train all observant Muslims to master their appetites, and it creates bonds among Muslims through the shared experience.</td>
<td><strong>tark 'ibadat al-awthan / abandonment of sin.</strong> Abstinence is viewed as protection from &quot;ignorance&quot;, not from bodily distractions. Abstinence is not for the body, in terms of food and drink, but for the soul and mind in terms of total spiritual endeavor. This kind of allegorical fasting implies abstaining from any thinking that God is limited in any way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>hajj / pilgrimage.</strong> The annual pilgrimage to Mecca. All adult Muslims should perform the hajj at least once in their lives, if they are physically and financially able.</td>
<td><strong>bara'ah min al-abalisah wal-tughayan</strong> purification. Metaphorically refers to the pilgrimage of the soul trying to journey inward trying to reach the &quot;House&quot; (i.e. knowledge) and gain peace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>shahada / bearing witness, testimony.</strong> &quot;There is no God but God, and Muhammad is His messenger&quot;. Anyone who says these words, with sincerity, is a Muslim.</td>
<td><strong>tawhid al-bari / avowed unism, belief that the doctrine of unity was preached in every age. Meant for all ages, times, and epochs. Muwahiddun believe humans are now able to absorb the truth without having to declare the shahada, or having it interpreted by the Imam.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>jihad / effort directed towards a determined objective.</strong> The noble struggle. Any struggle for a good purpose.</td>
<td><strong>rida / resignation with satisfaction to whatever God does Considered the outcome of fulfilling the previous duties.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>walaya / allegiance.</strong></td>
<td><strong>taslim / submission.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Allegiance to the leader of the ummah (community of believers), that is, the Caliph or the Imam.

Submission to the One God. In contrast to walaya, the Caliph or Imam is not a focus here. Obedience or allegiance is not to be focused on an earthly intermediary, but directly at God through complete submission, and contentment in that.

(Source: Shavit 1993:133-144)

The religious and political landscape

The Druze community began as a campaign to renew and reform religion within Islam, and resulted in the establishment of a schismatic sect. They were thus viewed as oppositional from the start by the religious mainstream. Their religious marginality has been intensified by their own secretiveness about religious matters, fatawa published by Sunni clerics (religious legal opinion), knowledge that Druze are permitted to practice taqiyya (permissible dissimulation), and their belief in reincarnation, among other things. The occasional fatawa promulgated by the Al-Azhar in Cairo, one of the most important centers of religious authority in Islam, proclaim the Druze to be heretics, and thus not true Muslims. This is a major source of acute discomfort and sensitivity for many Druze, who frequently emphasized to me the importance of their identification as Muslims.
The nature of their sect in terms of its religious principles and practice tends to augment the suspicion and disregard of some Sunni Muslims, who comprise 80-90% of the Syrian population. The sect is secretive, even Druze who are non-initiates are not permitted to read certain central texts. Muslim outsiders often see this as evidence of the sect's shaky foundations, as proof that there are good reasons the sect does not want to put itself up for scrutiny. Some progressive Druze sheikhs in Lebanon are putting forth the argument that the veils of secrecy should be lifted, but opposition to this within the uqqal community is overwhelming.

Druze do not practice outward adherence to the central five pillars of Islam. They claim to adhere to the five pillars like any other good Muslim, but in a metaphorical, internal, and personal way, adding that outward adherence to the pillars is merely self-promotion, a superficial performance of piety, which further offends Muslims. They are known to practice taqiyya (permissible dissimulation) as a matter of self-preservation. And in addition, they hold an atypical (for the Islamic context) belief in reincarnation.

All of these matters, those that bear on the nature of their identification as Syrian citizens (e.g., Jebel al-Arab
versus Jebel ad-Druz) as well as those that bear on perceptions of themselves as good or bad Muslims, were among the issues I encountered during fieldwork. All these topics fall very broadly under what might be called the issue of ongoing negotiation of Druze identity in Syria. None of the issues mentioned so far were discussed with ease, at least at first, and the Druze with whom I spoke were always circumspect about, on the one hand, being sincerely invested in their identification as Syrians, Arabs, and Muslims, while at the same time not wanting to lose or compromise what was special to them about being Druze as a result of those broader affiliations. But because the ground rules for Syrian citizenship and Islamic affiliation tend to be cast in an either/or manner, the subtle complexity of their multiple affiliations tends to be muted at first glance, as a matter of well-cultivated habit. This dissertation is in large part an effort to explore and explain this dynamic.
CHAPTER THREE: ETHNICITY, ETHNOGRAPHY, AND HISTORY

This chapter discusses various related topics. Because the primary focus in this dissertation is on a religious minority, one of the major concerns here is in elucidating notions of relational identity from a Druze point of view. Can it be said that there is some kind of distinct Druze identity? Are there various identities depending on contexts? Can we use the term ethnicity to discuss these dynamics? Are we (as a discipline) fetishizing ethnicity and identity?

In this chapter I also discuss the way that anthropology has tended to look at, study, and divide the Arab world thematically and theoretically. This helps in showing how the dissertation conforms to and departs from received convention especially in connection with my emphasis on trends in ethnographic writing and anthropological categorizations and distinctions.

Finally I offer some historical background regarding how minority groups and the Druze in particular, have fared under different governmental regimes (e.g., Ottoman, French, Israeli, Lebanese, and Syrian).

Esman and Rabinovich (1988) claim that attention to ethnic pluralism in the states of the Middle East has not
been given the scholarly attention it deserves. Although it has not been a totally neglected topic, they believe that in proportion to its impact throughout the region it has been given scant attention by both outside and internal commentators. Ethnic conflict, they claim, explains more about Middle East politics than is reflected in academic writing. One could point to both Cyprus and Lebanon as quick examples of countries with a long history of inter- and intra-sectarian conflict and warfare.

Judging from the two most recent annual review articles that deal with the anthropology of the Arab World (Abu-Lughod 1989) or the Mediterranean Culture Area (Gilmore 1982), ethnicity as such is not a focus. This may in part be due to trends in social science theorizing, that is, certain foci might lend themselves more easily to different contexts. Certain bodies of regional ethnography develop a particular trajectory in response to the forces of historical disciplinary discourse. Vivieros de Castro, for example, claims that because Lévi Strauss developed his theoretical elaborations in an Amazonian context, structuralism became a particularly influential thematic agenda, and made its mark in the regional ethnography of Amazonia (Vivieros de Castro 1996). In Indian ethnography, there is an overarching interest in hierarchy and caste, in
part due to the legacy of Dumont. The ethnography of the Arab world and the Mediterranean in general has been trying to wean itself of its obsession with the honor/shame complex. Similarly, for China, filial piety long functioned as analytical focus eclipsing other possibilities. Trouillot (1992) refers to these as "gatekeeping concepts". Gatekeeping concepts “are so-called ‘native’ traits mythified by theory in ways that bound the object of study” which in effect prevent full investigation of the complexity of a region (21-22). Trouillot points out that the way in which anthropological theory develops these influential analytical concepts in particular regions says as much about anthropology as it does about that region. He claims that the Caribbean is the region most immune to the penetration of lasting gatekeeping concepts because, in effect, the Caribbean is a discordant frontier, one that has been thoroughly turned upside down as a result of its colonial history. And although theory can never completely enclose its object of study, the Caribbean is particularly immune to theoretical enclosure, or so Trouillet claims. In his view, anthropological theory has not found a way to deal with the themes created by the ravages of colonialism the region experienced (nearly entire loss of indigenous populations, slave trade, resource depletion, impoverishment, etc.) with
handles as convenient as honor-and-shame, the caste system, or filial piety (22).

In the ethnography of the Middle East and North Africa, issues of ethnicity are discussed as part of larger topics such as allegory and performance (e.g., Lavie 1990), history (Shryock 1997), and narrative ethnography (Abu-Lughod 1986, 1993; Caton 1990). These ethnographies discuss the way different groups see themselves relative to their neighbors, friends, enemies, co-religionists, and fellow citizens, but not by focusing on ethnicity as such. As these anthropologists show, ethnicity can productively be examined as a specifically relational issue without talking explicitly about ethnicity as such, but about relational dynamics in general. The "problem" of lack of focus on ethnic pluralism that Esman and Rabinovich suggest may not be much of problem, at least not in the anthropology of the Middle East in North Africa.

What do we mean by the terms, ethnicity and ethnic group? Following Eriksen (1995), ethnicity is not about cultural differences that develop when groups live in relative isolation from each other. Rather, ethnicity is relational.

Ethnicity is frequently most important in contexts where groups are culturally close and enter into contact with each other regularly. Anthropology may
therefore give an answer to a seeming paradox of our time, namely that whereas cultural differences in many regards become less apparent because of increased contact and the general processes of modernisation, ethnic identity and self-consciousness become increasingly important. The more similar people become, it seems, the more they are concerned with remaining distinctive. (Eriksen 1995:250)

The important and useful point made here applies very much, in my view, to the Syrian context. It is not isolation and objective cultural differences that create an ethnic group or a sense of ethnicity. On the contrary, a modicum of contact between members of different group can engender a sense of distinct identity/ethnicity. Moreover there must be some common basis for interaction, despite whatever differences between the groups that indeed do exist.

Are Esman and Rabinovich right that ethnic pluralism is neglected in studies of the region? If so, why this neglect? In a recent review article, Abu-Lughod claims that the anthropological study of the Arab Middle East has largely tended to fit into a few specific "zones" of theorizing (Abu Lughod:1989). In making this claim, Abu-Lughod takes her cue from Appadurai (1988, 1986), who observes that anthropology has tended to develop in its study of complex societies certain key foci, or "theoretical metonyms", that can shape much of the scholarship of a particular region. Appadurai, for example, bemoans the fact
that caste has come to function as a dominant metonym for Indian society. Abu-Lughod lays out a convincing argument that the key metonyms for anthropological theorizing of the Middle East have tended to break down into three main concerns: segmentary lineage, the harem, and Islam.

**Segmentary Lineage**

A focus on segmentary lineage arose out of the application of British structural-functionalist models to social phenomenon. Evans-Pritchard's seminal work among the Nuer is a prominent and classic statement of anthropological interest in segmentary lineage. Decades later, a focus on tribalism and/or segmentary lineage has spiraled off and been subsumed into various sub-categories: political anthropology, anthropology and history, tribal poetics. Contemporary ethnographies that concern "tribalism", that focus on bedouin social organization in some way, tend to do so in a way that focuses only obliquely on the structural mechanics of segmentary lineage. I would venture to say that a metonym driving Middle Eastern ethnography in the 1980s and 1990s would be that of the poetic society. This might merely reflect trends in social science at large, and the popular focus on expressive arts influenced by (a) ethnography of speaking that helped fuel Bakhtin's
ascendancy since the 1980s; (b) Foucauldian discourse analysis, as well as (c) cultural Marxists' reinvigoration of the Frankfurt School. At the same time, however, a focus on the poetic in Middle East ethnography is not otherwise surprising considering the premium placed locally on verbal play and skillful oratory. Caton (1990) and Lavie (1990), both of whom deal with uses of expressive language in tribal politics and identity, turn out very different ethnographies, but both deeply rooted in the verbal arts as the stage for assertions made by tribespeople about themselves and the world they inhabit. However, Shryock's (1997) recent ethnography set in Jordan considers the constructedness of history in both the oral and emerging written traditions of the Jordanian bedouin. His ethnography marks a departure from a trend in ethnographic writing that perhaps fetishizes tribal society as a particularly poetic society. He self-consciously sets his ethnography apart from the work of some of his more immediate predecessors.

I have not, for example, manufactured a conventional ethnohistory of the Balga tribes, nor have I subjected Bedouin verbal arts to the latest devices of literary criticism. (2)

Smadar Lavie invokes this imagery of "collapsed otherness" when she reflects on the paradox of Jewish-Arab identity that colored her ethnographic experience among the Mzeina Bedouin of the southern Sinai....
Subjective identifications of the sort Lavie describes are no less constructed, revealing, deluded, or potentially blinding than those modeled on more "objective" presentations of self .... I am neither a Palestinian American, nor an Arab Israeli Jew, nor a Muslim, nor even a "halfie" of any advantageous sort. When I arrived in Jordan, I had no "natural" ties to the tribal community I intended to study, only "political" ones — American, guest, client, financial resource, Orientalist, future patron, potential spy — and my hosts sought vigorously, and with genuine concern, to "naturalize" me. (Shryock 1997:3-4)

Shryock focuses specifically on issues surrounding written and oral historiography. He is very deliberate in stating that his is not a study of verbal art, nor is it a meditation on issues "identity", his or the Balga.

In Middle Eastern ethnography, it is interesting to consider the give and take involved in the evolution of "gatekeeping" concepts. Is a focus on segmentary lineage/tribal society in the region a legacy of Evans-Pritchard's influence? What other gatekeeping concepts in the region's ethnography may have to do with aspects of social organization or preoccupation that are so overarching that it is difficult not to address them?

**The "Harem"**

The so-called "harem" zone approach to anthropological theorizing can be translated as basically a focus on women, gender, and sexuality. Notwithstanding the positive aspects
of a fluorescence of gender-based work in social science, the Middle East has long provoked a somewhat prurient and self-righteous fascination when it comes to women's worlds (Alloula 1986). Alloula documents this eroticized fascination in his book on postcards sent home by colonial populations in North Africa at the turn of the century. What Alloula documents is just one part of the highly sexualized Western/Orientalist approach to the Middle East during colonial times apparent in the nineteenth century art, such as in the canvases of Delacroix and Manet, and the literature of Gustave Flaubert, just to name a few. The West is simultaneously fascinated and appalled by ideas they have of Middle Eastern women's lives. In my own experience, the most frequently asked question that I receive by academics and non-academics alike regards the experience of women in the Syria. Most typically I am asked: What are their lives like? Is it as horrible as it seems? How was I treated as a single woman while I was there? These questions reveal a fascination that is fed by deeply ingrained stereotypes.

In order to understand women's worlds it is not enough to just focus on one half of the population. Gender, of course, exists for men as well as women. Earlier

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21 For further reading on this topic, one particularly rich source is
generations of social scientists elaborated a rigidly
dualistic notion of the Mediterranean split into
public/private spheres dominated by an honor/shame complex.
In theory and analysis, this tended to put great distance
between men's and women's worlds, a condition certainly
brought on by the practical difficulty of male researchers' inability to gain any but the most cursory, often
second-hand, access to women's worlds. The fact of this inaccessibility persists to the present (e.g., Shryock 1997;
Caton 1990). But recent ethnographers tend to admit more freely the structural limitation. Women in the field tend
to have somewhat more access to men's world by virtue of their status as foreigners (Lavie 1990; Abu-Lughod 1988;
however, a notable exception to this is Fernea 1965).

Middle Eastern society has always posed conundrums for Westerners. Part of the reason for this, or you could say part of the effects of this mystification, is the existence of a long history of mutual antagonism, suspicion, and misrepresentation between the Middle East and the West going back even further than the medieval Crusades, and which is alive and well in the 1990s. Central to the perpetuation of this long-standing friction have been Western perceptions of Middle Eastern women. Harlow claims that "the

misunderstandings of the woman's place and role in the respective societies have continued through the centuries to scar relations between the different cultures" (Harlow 1986:xiv). She is speaking here of the historical relationship between France and Algeria, but it applies to the larger context as well.

Chapter Five of this dissertation, which focuses on marriage and outmarriage, discusses gender ideology and gender politics among the Druze. However, chapter five is more accurately described as a study of community and family dynamics.

Islam

In her review article Abu-Lughod points out that a focus on Islam in anthropological writing about the region continues today. For her the potential problem with this is that it can sometimes create (or result in) a monolithic view since indeed the Arab world, the Middle East, and North Africa is diverse religiously (as well as linguistically, ethnically, geographically, etc.).

Islam itself is diverse. It is divided into two main traditions, Sunni and Shi'a. The foundational difference between Sunnis and Shi'ites lies in their different views of lines of succession in the caliphate (see footnote 10).
In addition to this major division in Islam, there is also a profusion of over seventy sects. This dissertation focuses to some degree on issues that relate to the Druze sect's place in Islam as a whole. Many Muslims consider the Druze to be heretics. Based on my fieldwork, most Druze I encountered clearly considered themselves to be members of Muslim sect. A minority among the Druze, however, consider themselves to decidedly not be Muslim, to be a religion apart.

Ethnicity, Periphery, and History

Despite the fact that anthropologists have long tended to seek out the "small places" (Eriksen 1995) and the "periphery" (as opposed to, say, an urban anthropology22), in the Arab Middle East this has not necessarily resulted in a metonymic focus on the region as an ethnically diverse place. This does not necessarily mean anthropologists who work in the Middle East face a problem or a crisis of orientation. Sometimes an emphasis on ethnicity or minority

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22 Early (1993), however, is one among several examples of recent urban-based anthropology in the Middle East that still seeks out the "small place". For her 1993 book, she did fieldwork in a neighborhood in Cairo, the largest city on the African continent, but her rendering of it conveys a village-like containedness, not a metropolis. Shryock notes that early anthropology in the Middle East was largely urban-focused, like Lane's Customs and Manners of the Modern Egyptians (1836) and Hurgronje's Mekka in the Latter Part of the Nineteenth Century (1931). But by the sixties, the city had become an alien place in Middle Eastern anthropology (Shryock 1997:20,3nn).
groups emphasizes difference over shared cultural experience and perspective.

On the one hand, my fieldwork could be said to be typically anthropological in that it was focused on a periphery, that is, on a minority that makes up only three to five percent of the population of Syria. Moreover the Druze sect is only one of the over seventy sects in Islam. But at the same time, my interest in the Druze, indeed a peripheral group in the greater scheme of things, was one that emphasized how they saw themselves as part of the larger world around them. Sometimes I was chided by the people among whom I was doing my research. It would be pointed out that by its very design, by being Druze-based, my research emphasized Druze difference over the fact of their shared identity with Arabs, Muslims, and Syrians. My effort in this dissertation and my research has been to point out shared affinities beyond that of just "Druze", as well as Druze-specific points of identity.

**Ethnic Politics: The Ottomans**

How has the issue of ethnicity been dealt with during and since Ottoman times? The Ottoman empire, spanning four centuries, was one in which Sunni Islam was used to develop a sense of a larger Muslim community. This sense of
community, based as it was on religious identity, thus superseded claims to other loyalties, be they ethnic or linguistic (Karpat 1988:49). However, the Ottomans were still occupiers and regarded as such despite the fact that there was less cultural and religious distance with the Ottomans than there was with French and English during the Mandatory period in the early and mid-twentieth century.

Under Ottoman hegemonic rule, ethnic and minority communities were tolerated and even protected as long as they complied with the authority of the state (Esman and Rabinovich 1988:4). It was following the Ottoman period, as the European models of the sovereign state and ideologies of nationalism were imported, that ethnic and other minority communities came to be sources of tension, at odds among themselves as well as with the emerging states of the Middle East. Firro (1988) predicted that the Druze in Syria, in contrast to Lebanon and Israel, would face the potential for full assimilation into the state.

In Syria ... the Druze traditional leadership has ceased to exist. Adaptation to the Syrian political system and state ideology is now made individually. Clan leaders no longer bargain in the name of the community. The process of integration in the sociopolitical system may lead the Syrian Druze to become fully assimilated within Syrian society. (Firro 1988:197)
It certainly is the case that the Druze historically were shrewd in their bargaining with various states, whether we are talking about the Ottomans, French, Hashemites, or Damascene nationalists. But I find Firro's statement alarmist.

Schaebler (1998) chronicles the history of Druze interaction with various outside power brokers in the period spanning 1838-1949. In her detailed account she makes it clear that there were often two sets of conflicts ongoing for the Druze. The two fronts in which power struggles were ongoing were: (1) between the elite shaykh-ly class of traditional Druze leadership and the outside colonizer/state, and (2) between the common peasant class of non-elite Druze and their shaykhs.

Schaebler contends that Druze internal factionalism was in fact one of the important factors that has enabled them to have an enduring staying power over the long haul. Internal factionalism includes both power struggles among the wealthy, land-owning families, as well as between the landless and landed classes. In the period Schaebler describes, the landless clientele classes were able to play themselves off against the traditional Druze leadership when it was in their interest to do so at two particular crucial moments. The traditional Druze leaders were thus ...
challenged as much, at times, from within their own society as from the state(s), in danger of being crushed between the two and thus forced to move and develop strategies for their survival. This experience not only turned them into shrewd politicians, but also made the small group (100,000 people in the 1940s in Syria) as a whole much more resilient and adaptable to the state's demands and opportunities than other groups in the Middle East. While in the overwhelming majority of the cases the integration of a tribal, religious, and ethnic group was achieved via the elites, which continued to act as mediators between the state and their clientele until the state intervened directly through measures like land reform and the like, the Druze "common people" twice played the state against their elite. Two armed conflicts along these lines within a time span of roughly two generations are highly unusual, and as a whole this kind of "joint" integration was the exception and not the rule in the Middle East. (Schaebler 1998:363-364)

Schaebler's account of the period gives some insight into why the Druze have endured through many periods fraught with internal conflict as well as outside threats.

Druze in Israel.

In Israel the small Druze minority (about 1%) has achieved a privileged position in comparison to other minorities. They are considered the Israeli State's "favorite" minority, and are seen to enjoy a "special relationship" with the Jewish majority (Hajjar 1995:411). Hajjar points out that there is also a certain mystique that the Druze have in Israeli public opinion which certainly is not the case in Lebanon or Syria. In Israel, the Druze have achieved a special status, one that clearly separates them
from other Arabs in Israel, notably the Palestinians. The state categorizes the Druze as having an identity separate from those of the other Arabs in Israel. Their identification cards indicate that their "nationality" is "Druze", as opposed to the "Arab" nationality typically ascribed to Palestinian Arabs.

The Druze stand out in Israel for one particularly significant reason: since 1956 Druze men have been conscripted into the Israeli Defense Force (henceforth, IDF). By law, they are required to perform military service (unless they opt not to do so for religious reasons, as Hasidic Jews are able to do). In Israel, army service is a prerequisite for many jobs, and career advancement in general. The state prefers to post Druze soldiers in situations where their Arabic as well as their "traditional mentality" can be capitalized on, specifically, in policing the Palestinian Arabs. The Druze Border Guards who are posted in East Jerusalem and the West Bank have a particularly fierce reputation. The fact of their army service for the Israeli state has led to some distrust of Druze in the countries of Syria and Lebanon, as well as outright resentment by Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.
Israeli, French Mandatory period, and Ottoman approaches to the administration of minorities parallel each other: the divide and rule approach. Hajjar describes the state's policy of distinguishing them from other Palestinians as ... grounded in a notion that capitalizing on social diversity and sectarian particularism would be a good strategy for dividing up the Arab minority so as to better control it. (Hajjar 1995:419)

For the most part, this strategy has been "resoundingly successful" (ibid). Some of the most notable steps implemented in the gradual effort to separate the Druze politically from their Palestinian neighbors have included the following:

- 1956: Compulsory military service for Druze men instituted. 1957: Ministry of Religious Affairs grants separate status to the Druze. From this point on they are considered "Druze" and not "Muslims".
- 1961: Druze religious leadership recognized as independent religious council.
- 1962: Knesset ratifies Druze Law Courts Bill, granting the Druze religious council judicial autonomy in matters of religious and personal status.
- 1962: Juridical separation. On identity cards, which all residents and citizens of the State of Israel must carry, "Arab" is replaced with "Druze" as their official nationality. (Hajjar 1995:429)

This has been a gradual process. Israel's attempts to similarly integrate Palestinian Christian Arabs and the Druze of the Golan Heights have not been as successful.
The success in differentiating the Israeli Druze from other minorities has been a decades-long process of deliberate identity construction. Furthermore Hajjar points out that this has been a collaborative, not just uni-directional, effort to construct a Druze "national/religious" identity. It was accomplished at the cost of "deliberately alienating them from a history they share with other Palestinians" (Hajjar 1995:410). The consequence of this has been that "the Israeli Druze really have become quite distinct from Israeli Arabs (i.e., Muslims and Christians) in more than just the objective manifestation of distinct 'nationality' as inscribed in their identity cards" (ibid).

Although this essentially colonizing process involved the Druze's mindful participation, they were not in as strong a bargaining position with the state as they had been in other situations in the past. It is largely assumed that the choice to accept conscription into the IDF was economically-motivated. It was hoped that serving in the military would open up other opportunities for the community as a whole. Like their Palestinian neighbors, the Druze had lost significant land holdings to the state. But in the forties, the senior Druze leadership thought it would in the
long run be most advantageous for their small community if they made alliances with the emerging Jewish state.

This receptivity is in stark contrast to the Druze of the Golan Heights who have lived alongside a U.N.-administered border zone since the early 1970's. This region is hotly contested by Syria and Israel. In fact, the Golan Heights is perhaps the most critical sticking point for any prospective Syrian-Israeli peace settlement. As such, the position of the Golan Druze in general is an inherently ambiguous one. The Druze of the Israeli Golan live within the State of Israel, but in territory that remains highly contested, as the UN presence clearly attests. A common image of this territory has Israeli and Syrian Druze communicating to each other via megaphone across the U.N.-maintained border.

The resistance of the Golan Druze to the kind of integration the Israeli Druze (who live in the Galilee region of northwest Israel) have experienced is due to the fact that the Golan Druze were living within Syria proper until Israel seized part of the Heights in 1972. Golan residents did not face the decision the Galilee Druze did in the late 1940's regarding how to deal with the incipient Israeli State (within whose territory they clearly resided).
In Israel, the choice of the Galilee Druze to move toward integration can be seen as economically-motivated. It also shows how strong the lines of authority are within the Druze community. Not every Druze male since 1956 has necessarily been enthusiastic about IDF conscription. There have been oppositional movements, most notably within the Druze Communist Party. But there have also been Druze Zionists who requested permission to establish a settlement in the West Bank to show their support of the State\textsuperscript{23}.

In terms of Firro's argument, the Druze in Israel, excluding those in the Golan, have had a very particular identity carved out for themselves. Although they are relatively well integrated into the state, they are not necessarily assimilated. Structurally they stand apart, not just from the Jewish majority, but from the others. Religiously they are classified as "Druze", not "Muslim". Their nationality reads "Druze" not "Arab" on their identity cards. They are Israeli citizens, a "favorite minority" perhaps, but they do not share in the full benefits of this citizenship for various reasons, such as lingering prejudice and the isolation of their villages. When a Druze man is not in his army uniform, more often than not he is

\textsuperscript{23} The group's request was denied on the grounds that they were not
considered an Arab, a Palestinian. Also, not being Jewish prevents a full sharing of privileges. For example, it creates a "glass ceiling" effect in the IDF, where a full thirty percent of Druze men make their careers. Besides being prevented from joining certain elite forces because of religion, promotions within the ranks seem to stop at a certain invisible point for Druze as well as for Sephardic Jews.

The aim of this chapter has both been to discuss issues and trends in Middle Eastern ethnography, as well as to present some brief discussion of various Druze positions during the Ottoman, French, and contemporary eras. This is in order to set a contextual stage for my own ethnographic inquiry into some aspects of the Druze experience in Syria.

At this point, the focus of the dissertation will become less wide-ranging and more pointedly ethnographic. The following chapter offers an analysis of reincarnation in Druze everyday life.
CHAPTER FOUR: REINCARNATION — DIVIDED SELVES AND REINTEGRATIONS

The long, rather unedifying history of the warfare between science and religion in the West has tended to lead in this century to the conclusion that "at base" they are not really in conflict. In the sense that one cannot subject expressions of faith to scientific tests nor disprove natural laws by quoting scripture, this is no doubt true .... But for all this, the brute empirical fact is that the growth of science has made almost all religious beliefs harder to maintain and a great many virtually impossible to maintain. Even if they are not direct antitheses, there is a natural tension between the scientific and religious ways of attempting to render the world comprehensible .... Unless the importance of this "struggle for the real" is recognized and not passed off with easy pieties on either side, the history of religion, Islam or any other, in our times is, scientifically anyway, unintelligible. The warfare between science and religion ... is not only not over; it is quite likely never going to end. (Geertz 1968:103-104)

Abu Qasim was deeply skeptical ...

For most of his life Abu Qasim was deeply skeptical about the whole issue of reincarnation. He would often preface stories about reincarnation to me with two complementary points. First Abu Qasim made it clear that he had always had a deep respect for the Druze doctrine with which he was raised. Then he would add that at the same time that did not mean he blindly accepted every esoteric tenet with which the Druze are associated. As pointed out in earlier chapters, the Druze sect is a secretive one. Only a select few, al-agaliyya ("the knowledgeable"), have
been initiated into its inner circles and have access to the esoteric tracts that elaborate the theological and philosophical underpinnings of Druze belief (and, more importantly, their interpretation). To some degree this compartmentalization of specialized religious knowledge thwarts the potential for extended debate in the Druze community about the principles of their faith. On the other hand, it also provides the opportunity to simply accept on faith that there is a rationale and an explanation for certain things. These, because of their inaccessibility, are beyond general understanding. Sometimes in discussions Druze friends would say to me that "this is just the way it is. We are not able to read all the books, so we do not know. We do know that there is a reason for everything in our sect, but because much of it is kept secret, we must accept that there is a logic, a reason, an explanation for everything.

Abu Qasim largely discounted the notion of reincarnation for most of his life because he felt it could not be explained scientifically. To him it represented a superstitious folk belief more than anything. Abu Qasim is one among many who exemplify Geertz's musings on the

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24 All the names in this and other chapters are pseudonyms. This was the agreement I came to with people, based entirely on their preferences regarding issues of representation.
"struggle for the real", exemplified by what he calls the warfare between science and religion (Geertz 1968:90-117). Indeed many Druze friends with whom I spoke hesitated to be identified as unquestioning believers of reincarnation. Amal, for example, explains her family's initial hesitation to investigate rumors of her mother's reincarnation as due to the fact that they were educated people. There is clearly some tension between ideas people have of the incommensurability between science and religion that is expressed by some. This spills over as well into perceptions people have of what constitutes educated and non-educated, and city versus country populations. This is not an unusual dynamic in itself, but it helps explain the feeling of stigmatization that comes from within as well as outside the community regarding reincarnation beliefs and other aspects of their sectarian identity. Sunni Muslim and Christian Damascenes poke fun at the Druze belief in reincarnation. This is as much a part of the "sophisticated urbanites" denigration of the "backward country peasant", as it is a comment on religious hierarchies (i.e., Sunni Islam as authoritative, Druze sect as heretical). Stigma comes from within as well as without.

But sometimes people had to reconcile the skepticism that they associate with their understanding of science or
education with experiences they had in their lives. In such cases, they were always careful to have sought out and then describe to me clear cut proof that someone claiming to be a reincarnated loved one was who they claimed to be. This usually meant some intimate family knowledge was disclosed to them by the individual claiming to be a reincarnated relative. This was knowledge that only the deceased family member could have known. As such the language of testimony is central in reincarnation stories. Yet acceptance of such testimony is not always immediate. Nor are the reunions that occur necessarily joyous events. At first I naively thought a reunion with a close family member in reincarnated form would be cause for joy, but soon I learned that for the most part it is an occasion fraught with mixed emotions.

Afternoon Visits

I did not go to Syria thinking I was going to focus on reincarnation. But as often happens to anthropologists who spend any length of time "in the field", their original research foci almost invariably shift and become transformed. In the course of my fieldwork it became increasingly clear how pervasive the phenomenon of

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25 Whom Stevenson (1980) refers to as the "previous personality".
reincarnation is among the Druze. As fieldwork progressed, I spent more and more time discussing reincarnation with people, and collecting reincarnation stories. Nearly every Druze family I met has had some kind of encounter with the phenomenon, and reincarnation stories abound. Occasionally I happened upon their stories purely by accident.

One afternoon, for example, in the house where I rented an apartment in Suwayda', I stopped by to say hello to Um Mansur, the house matriarch, just as school was letting out. A young schoolgirl of about fifteen years old, dressed in her school uniform of dark green olive khakis, was sitting in the kitchen with Um Mansur, drinking tea. They were talking softly. I sat down to join them, not wanting to interrupt their visit, but also not wanting to resist Um Mansur’s insistent entreaty that I sit down and have some tea with them. The girl left not long after I arrived, and I asked Um Mansur if she was one of her grandchildren. She avoided the question the first time around, but I did not get the hint and asked again after a few minutes. People are always curious about who visited whom each day, and it is a common topic of discussion. I was asking a customary question. After asking the second time, she replied, “she is my mother”. Um Mansur’s initial hedging may have had to do with me being an outsider. She may have been hesitant to
mention an issue tied up in sect doctrine with me. She may have been doing some image management with me, avoiding talking about a phenomenon that most outsiders (i.e., non-Druze in Syria) as well as many insiders are dubious about.

Indeed, even within the community there are plenty of skeptics, as well as reluctant believers. There is also some sensitivity to outsider perceptions of the issue of reincarnation which is not surprising considering that the Druze are stigmatized by both Muslims and Christians for, among other things, having a belief in reincarnation. In general, they are a stigmatized minority group, and many of Goffman's observations of the dynamics of stigmatization apply.

Apart from the debate about reincarnation, that is, whether it can be "proven" or not, it has concrete social effects both on families and communities. Among other things, reincarnation functions in Druze society to bring together members of unrelated families who otherwise would never have cause to know one another, as afternoon tea with Um Mansur and her "mother" indicates. Reciprocal social relations ensue from these "reincarnated" relationships that are not blood based in an immediate sense, though these relationships do indeed take on some of the parameters of kinship. Moreover, it is assumed that a reincarnated
individual is in fact "pure" Druze, effectively obviating the question of blood ties (see Chapter Five for how this point figures in marriage politics). Kin terms are used to refer to individuals who claim to be reincarnated kin. Though in a sense it is a matter of choice. Not all members of a family who is approached by an individual are equally receptive to reincarnated kin. At the same time, many lifelong reincarnated kin relationships are maintained. Regular visits occur, gifts are exchanged, sometimes financial assistance is involved.

The Story of Shafiq/Marwan

Abu Qasim had four stories for me concerning reincarnation. Of these, the story about his brother, Shafiq, is perhaps the most significant one for Abu Qasim. The circumstances surrounding his brother Shafiq's death and reincarnation forced Abu Qasim to re-examine for himself the possibility that reincarnation might not be just some quaint belief of country folk. He related to me that after he had finally met and spoke at length with the man who claimed to be his deceased brother, he started to read as much as he could on reincarnation. Abu Qasim was clearly impressed, particularly with Shafiq's knowledge of intimate family history. He reported that Shafiq "knew so many things in
precise detail [such as] special things shared between him and his mother only", that it was impossible to ignore the possibility he was reincarnated. Abu Qasim was the youngest child in his family by many years. He was a young boy when his older brother Shafiq died. While working on the family farm, an accident occurred that left Shafiq caught under an upended tractor. His father, who was also injured in the accident, was unable to save his son’s life. The field where they were working was far from the nearest village. This story of Shafiq exemplifies the many cases of reincarnation that involve death caused by a sudden and often violent accident. In a case that will be described later in this chapter, Amal’s mother died at home as a result of a freak electrical accident. Some Druze speculate that when the soul is taken by surprise like this, it is not prepared yet to move beyond the earthly, corporeal level of existence. The soul is still attached to the people it suddenly left behind. Amal told me that after her mother died,

"It was always said that, ‘god-willing, your mother is reincarnated. Certainly your mother is reincarnated.’"

"People said that?", I asked.
"Yes," she replied, "because whoever dies in an accident and has children or has something special, it is said that god-willing they are reincarnated. This is especially so in the case of a violent sudden accident."
But it is not so much the case when it comes to a natural death. (1996.06.18)

In Stevenson's extensive, comparative, cross-cultural studies of reincarnation cases, some universal features are identified that appear across societies. One of these is the prevalence of the violent nature of deaths of people who are said to be reincarnated.

High incidences of violent deaths among the previous personalities have been found in all ... cultures in which I have studied these cases .... Violent death is usually unexpected and sudden ... A considerable number of the ... previous personalities died at a time when they had what I call "unfinished business". By this expression I refer to someone like a mother who dies and leaves an infant or small child needing her care. (Stevenson 1980:355)

Stevenson adds that even in cases of reincarnation that involve non-violent natural death, the death was usually sudden and unexpected. The soul is taken by surprise, as one of my Druze friends would say. It is interesting to note that in Stevenson's comparison of the modes of death of previous personalities in reincarnation across eight different cultures, the Lebanese/Syrian Druze and the Turkish Alawites have the highest percentage of violent deaths (see Table 4.1).
Table 4.1: Data on Percentage of Violent Deaths in Cases of Reincarnation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Percentage of Violent Deaths</th>
<th>Total Number of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon and Syria (Druze)</td>
<td>67.6%</td>
<td>77 cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey (Alawi)</td>
<td>73.7%</td>
<td>133 cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Columbia and Alaska (Haida)</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>24 cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>41.6%</td>
<td>31 cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>95 cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>46.8%</td>
<td>172 cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska (Tlingit)</td>
<td>36.2%</td>
<td>65 cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burma</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>230 cases</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Derived from Stevenson 1980:356)

Stevenson can only speculate as to why violent and/or sudden death is such a common feature cross-culturally in cases of reported reincarnation. Perhaps, he offers, it is due to the intensity and suffering of the pre-death experience. The intensity might somehow fix the memory of the death, and then by association, other memories of the life left behind adhere. Gupta offers a local explanation for this from his fieldwork in India. People who die a sudden and unexpected are said to be able to remember their previous life.

26 A colleague who did fieldwork in the Indian community of San Pedro Amuzgos, Oaxaca, Mexico, reports that in that community, reincarnation
existence well because "although their body was destroyed, their being ... was still roaming about in an unconscious state .... if one dies unexpectedly, the memory of the past is still alive after nine months in a new womb" (Gupta 1992:189190).

A couple of years after Shafiq died, Abu Qasim left for Nigeria for a stay of about ten years. He relates that at that time he knew reincarnation of Shafiq was a possibility, but he was unable to be really certain of it. When he returned to Syria in the early 1970s his sister informed him that there was some talk circulating around town about a reincarnated person, possibly Shafiq.

My sister told me about ... a reincarnated person living here in Suwayda'. His name was Marwan al-Hasan. My sister told me ... he came to us [while Abu Qasim was in Nigeria], and she met with him. I wasn't exactly doubtful about this matter, I just hadn't seen him directly. I went to his house, the house of Hasan in Suwayda' .... I entered and sat down. All of us were present in the room. He entered. No one saw that he entered .... He said his greetings, salaam alay, as usual, greeting everyone. I had not seen the family before, any of them. He greeted me, and he said to me, "Welcome A'del" without anyone knowing me, or having told him about me. I mean, he did not know me. We sat down and we talked some. I wanted to be more sure. After two days I went to Damascus. I told him I wanted to come another time when there was enough time, when there weren't any people, so I could ask him questions. (1996.05.22)

is said to occur only as a result of violent death (Elizabeth Cartwright, personal communication).
Abu Qasim wanted to hear more about what Marwan/Shafiq had to say, but there was not an opportunity for this at their first formal meeting.

Another first encounter story comes from Saeed, a man in his seventies who met his reincarnated mother when she was about four years old. This encounter occurred about forty years ago. At that time he lived in Suwayda', a provincial capitol, and the young girl lived in the village of Salkhad, about thirty kilometers southeast of Suwayda'. The girl's paternal uncle had gone to Suwayda' to inform Saeed's family about the young girl and what she had been saying. Apparently the girl had convinced some members of her natal family that the other family she kept talking about really existed, that they were not just a figment of her imagination. The uncle went to visit Saeed's family, telling them about the girl and what she had been saying, and with an invitation to visit them in Salkhad. Saeed related to me the circumstances surrounding the first meeting with his reincarnated mother in the following way:

She had spoken to her family. She told them, "my name is so and so, and I have children who are named ..." and she would name all her children. She spoke to them about our life, you know, how we lived from day to day. She was four years old. Imagine that! [And she didn't have any way of knowing you before that?]

No, never. There had never been any kind of relationship between her and us. None at all. But of
course there was a sense of family among all of us. But it was not something that was religious- or sectarian-based. It was never something like that. This thing [i.e., reincarnation] is a social phenomenon ....

[What did your "mother" say to you the first time you went to Salkhad? What was it like that day?]
It was extremely difficult. She cried. She threw herself into her mother's housedress and cried. Of course I tried to encourage her to come over to me (but she was too overcome). On another day when her grandmother and grandfather came to visit me, she grabbed onto me like this, and she cried and cried. She loved me so much. And I loved her very much. You see how it was? She cried and cried and cried and cried. After a little while she started to feel better, her face was cleaned off. I reached for her face, and that's when I started to spoil and overindulge her [he laughs]. She never ran away from me again. And ever since that day, I always visit her.

It is a strange thing, not an everyday thing at all. Rather, it is a mystery. I can't explain it.
(1996.01.31)

For Abu Qasim, Amal, and others the sense that one is in the presence of a reincarnated person, and the willingness to accept that, is not necessarily immediate. In Saeed's case, however, it seems acceptance of his reincarnated mother came easily. But he is the exception in his immediate family. Saeed's sister, Rasmia, told me she had not seen Um Yasir (how she is referred to now) in several years. Rasmia was not particularly fond of Um Yasir, in large part because she felt Um Yasir never reciprocated with visiting and other social obligations. "She rarely visited us", Rasmia told me. Clearly Rasmia resented maintaining a one-way relationship. Saeed admitted
to me that he was the one among his siblings who most consistently maintained a relationship with his reincarnated mother, whom he always referred to as "my mother" (immi). Abu Qasim, on the other hand, approached his reincarnated kin with a decidedly studied distance at first. When Abu Qasim returned from Damascus and had time to visit the boy a second time, he and his wife drove to his house to talk with him again and "to be sure that he was exactly who he claimed to be or not". Abu Qasim reports the following:

The first question I asked him was "when exactly did you know you were reincarnated?"
He replied, "the first time I felt that I was someone else [literally, "that I was not myself"] was when I was three years old. I found myself thinking that I was an adult and therefore that I should be physically much larger. I was quite confused about why I was small, about why I was in a child's body."
Then he said to me, "soon after that sensation, memories of my mother came to me."  (1996.05.22)

The boy went on to describe how he also remembered specific details about places that were a part of his previous life. He clearly pictured the large apricot trees in the house where he had grown up as Abu Qasim's brother, and he was confused about the discrepancy between where he was living in the present verses where he thought he should be living. He started to talk about this to his natal family, but they told him to be quiet. They did not want him to talk about it .... He had four sisters, he was the only boy. His family got very angry. The boy said to them, "you are not my family. You are not my mother,
and he is not my father, and she is not my sister, and they" and so on. They got very angry. (1996.05.22)

Amal's story is similar in this regard. A young child expresses growing anger and frustration, feeling she is in the wrong home with the wrong family. Such outbursts are sometimes tolerated, hoping they will run their course. Sometimes they are unwelcome and aggravating. It is a confusing and difficult situation for the child, as well as their natal family. Not everyone encourages or even allows a child to talk in this manner. One friend told me she threatened her younger sister to keep her from talking about a previous life. She succeeded in effectively muting her sister early on from this kind of talk. The explanation she gave me justifying her use of scare tactics was simply that "it was stupid" for her younger sister to go on like that about another life and another family. For this woman, reincarnation was a superstition that further compromised the already shaky reputation of the Druze.

After describing the internal struggle Marwan/Shafiq underwent as a child struggling with an ill-understood past, Abu Qasim then went on to relate some of the stories the young boy told him during that visit. Once as a child, Abu Qasim was nearly run over while playing in the street. His older brother Shafiq saved his life, startling him with a
lunging tackle that got him out of the way of a truck barreling down the road. This was an incident Abu Qasim had long since forgotten, but immediately remembered upon its retelling. Not too long after the second meeting just described, Marwan al-Hasan’s family left for several years to Kuwait, where his father had a job. In this time, Abu Qasim read what he could about reincarnation. He was beginning to feel more certain that young Marwan was somehow also his deceased brother, Shafiq Faqih. But the boy had left to Kuwait with his family, contact with him had ceased. Abu Qasim did not tell me at this point what other members of his family thought, other than that his sister had told him about the boy in the first place. Not surprisingly, there is variability within families as far as receptiveness to reincarnated kin is concerned. For example, in the case of Saeed and his reincarnated mother, Um Yasir, it is primarily Saeed among five other siblings who actively maintains an ongoing relationship with his reincarnated mother. A few years later, on the day that the al-Hasan family returned to their home in Syria, Marwan (Shafiq) encountered Abu Qasim’s father and his family by chance in the street. He went up to him as though they were long time familiars, but Abu Qasim’s father did not recognize him. He asked Marwan, “how do you know us?”
He replied to the group, "I am his son, Shafiq. That is who I am."

No one believed him at first. Much of what he said concerned an explanation of how the accident happened. After that encounter in the street he came to see my father. My father also did not believe him at first until he spoke to him regarding exactly how the accident happened. He knew what he said on the day he died, what he said at the last moment .... My father was running and he wanted to help him, you know.

He was saying, "Oh father, do not bleed, do not bleed" until the end. My father had also been hurt in the accident.

After these words were said, my father said, "Alright. This man is surely Shafiq." (1996.05.22)

By the time of this encounter, Marwan (Shafiq) was a young adult. After his family's return from Kuwait, he renewed a relationship, this time as an adult, with Bayt Faqih (the house of Faqih). Abu Qasim describes the nature of his relationship with Marwan as warm and cordial. Before Marwan/Shafiq married, he visited members of Bayt Faqih to discuss the marriage and receive approval because, as Abu Qasim and his wife said to me, "it is customary." It is customary for a brother, a son, to talk to his family about marriage plans. Marwan (Shafiq) was considered to have a familial relationship with Abu Qasim. Shavit emphasizes in his dissertation that ...

in one significant area Druze society has remained unchanged and that is in the importance of the family unit .... Decisions, such as who to vote for or whether to buy a car, are made in consultation with the immediate extended family. The more important the decision, the greater the number of family members involved in making it. (Shavit 1993:20)
Certainly marriage is one of the most important decisions a Druze individual makes in their life. It is a decision made in concert with one's family. For the most part, it is a collective, not an individual, decision. For Marwan, it made perfect sense that he would discuss his marriage options and plans with both the extended family of his natal kin as well as his other kin, those he has as a result of his previous life.

Abu Qasim describes Marwan as having a very difficult life. He says Marwan has always lived as a divided person. "Life tires him out alot, he is weary from life." Abu Qasim and his wife expressed concern for him, but they see him less now that he is married and has a family of his own to raise. They attribute Marwan's difficulties, his weariness with life, as due in part to the emotional difficulty of being "a reincarnated one." It is my contention that reincarnation is a point of cohesion for the Druze community as a whole, but that this cohesion is gained only at the price of emotional splintering, at the cost of divided individual selves that usually manage to achieve some reintegration of self later in life. This might be said to emblematically reflect Druze society as a whole, rooted in scripturally based precepts established in the past, yet
steeped in challenges of the present. Integrating the past and the present is variously approached. Some refuse the past, seeing only the "scientific" and "modern" present; some steep themselves primarily in the past, pillars of secret theosophy in an often indifferent present; while many blend both worlds, but not without some disquiet.

As I heard more stories about reincarnation, it became increasingly clear that a pervasive ambivalence dominated the tenor of peoples' recollections, both in cases where (1) a family was faced with a child who was divided between the present and the past or, conversely, (2) a family had lost a loved one and was approached some years later by "a reincarnated one" (mutagammus). It was an emotionally fraught situation either way. When a reincarnated relationship was accepted and integrated into peoples' lives, it became, like any familial relationship, a relationship that was alternately a source of both anxiety and delight. Abu Qasim and his wife relished Marwan/Shafiq's visits, but most of the time were worried about what they perceived to be his sense of displacement and melancholy. In another case, Saeed said that both he and his "mother" were more often than not anxious about each others' welfare.
Right now it is a big problem for her because she is always thinking about how am I living, whether everything in my life is going well. And at the same time, I am always worried and fearful about her. Is her health good? Is she not tiring herself out by working too much? Is everyone treating her well? (1996.01.31)

These relationships carry with them an emotional burden in that like any familial relationship, they are both a source of contentment and anxious concern.

**Defining Reincarnation: A Note on Translation**

In Arabic, *taqammus* (reincarnation, transmigration of souls, metampsychosis) derives from the triliteral root, *qammasa* (to clothe with a shirt). A *qamiis* is a shirt. There is thus the implication that the principle of *taqammus* describes a soul that becomes re-clothed from one life to another. The corporeal body is the "shirt", the changing or material element for the soul. *Tanasukh* also carries the meaning "reincarnation" but has different connotations in terms of rebirth than *taqammus*. Specifically, *tanaskh* denotes transmigration that can include a soul moving from human to animal form. *Taqammus*, however, denotes transmigration that is limited to human "shirts" only. Shavit (1993:117) claims that although these differences in connotation exist, it does not mean that all Arab writers
are aware of these gradations in meaning of these and related terms.

Besides taqammus and tanasukh, there is another term I often heard used to refer to reincarnation. A person who has been reincarnated can be referred to as natiq. The corresponding verb form is natiqa (colloquially, "to be reincarnated"). I was stymied by these terms because the dictionary did not yield the definitions I expected. For natiq dictionaries also give "articulate, able to speak, endowed with the faculty of speech; speaking, talking; distinct, clear; endowed with reason". The corresponding verb form is defined as "to pronounce, utter, enunciate, say; to articulate, phonate, vocalize; to speak talk". Shavit says that most people who believe in taqammus also believe in the phenomenon known as natq "which means remembering one's actions in past lives" (1993:125). Shavit refers his readers to Stevenson's lifetime of work dedicated to the meticulous documentation of these kinds of cases, in which individuals recall specific, arcane knowledge of previous lives in subsequent incarnations. He also refers his readers to Druze sources of documented natq cases.

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28 The issue of natq and its relation to Druze reincarnation is debatable. During the International Druze Studies conference (June
Although Arabic is famous for single words often having many wide-ranging and disparate meanings\(^\text{29}\), I nonetheless find it compelling to consider the link between one who is reincarnated and one who is speaking. When Abu Qasim or Amal consider whether they are encountering a deceased loved one in another person's body, they are convinced in large part by speech. They in turn offer to convince me through reported speech. Amal, as will be shown, also reacts strongly to non-verbal language, to the idiosyncratic gestures that a young girl, who might possibly be her reincarnated mother, uses as she greets Amal and her siblings. But the most crucial evidence is in speech. And in the stories people told me, they made frequent use of reported speech, a common linguistic strategy for establishing authority and veracity in narrative (e.g., Bauman 1986; Briggs 1988).

\(^{29}\) In which a version of this chapter was given, another conference participant, Dr. Marwan Masri (Rizq Hospital, Lebanon) took issue with my use of the term, natq. He told me that although people may use the term, they are using it incorrectly. I unfortunately have not had the opportunity, due to the quick turnaround between time of the conference and the submission of the dissertation, to correspond with Dr. Masri on the issue further, which is something I look forward to doing.

\(^{29}\) And conversely, for certain revered animals or objects to be referred to by sometimes hundreds of different words, camel and lion being two such examples.
Amal's Story

Amal and her sisters joked with me that I probably knew more about the Druze and their beliefs than they did, or than they cared to know. This was their way of politely making a joke out of the fact that I seemed to never stop asking questions. I often used to spend the night at their house in the southern outskirts of Damascus, watching Arabic-dubbed Egyptian and Mexican soap operas late into the evening. It was a warm and relaxed place for me to go. Being so far away from my own family and friends and my life back in the US, it was comforting to be sandwiched in among them, to eat and drink tea with them, and to hear them sleeping in the middle of the night.

Both of their parents had died prematurely young, within a couple years of each other, leaving behind eight children. When this tragedy occurred, Amal's three older siblings were already married and out of the house. Her four younger siblings thus became Amal's responsibility after her parents died. She was eighteen when she assumed the duties of running the house as best she could. Fourteen years later I met Amal, when she was thirty-one. She was still unmarried, in a country where unmarried women over twenty-five were considered "over the hill" in terms of potential marriageability.
Amal told me at one of our first meetings that she knew someone who was reincarnated. There was a girl who knew things only her mother could know. Amal promised to tell me the girl's story and maybe even bring me to her village sometime. We never went to her village, but she did tell me the story. I had thus known since early in my fieldwork about the story of Amal's mother who died in an electrocution accident while doing housework. Four to five years after she passed away, rumors circulated about a young girl in a village 100 km to the south who was talking about a family she had left behind, a family that sounded very much like Amal's.

There are many similar elements in the stories related both by Amal and Abu Qasim. In early sections, both describe rumors and gossip about a reincarnation, followed by a description of problems a young child was having reconciling conflicting experiences of the present and the past. Both also tell of violent deaths preceding reincarnation. Also, they both describe ambivalence within families regarding whether or how to determine if a "previous personality" is indeed their relative. At the beginning of her story, Amal told me the following:

Approximately five years after my mother died, we started hearing stories that my mother was reincarnated [natiq] in a village in the district of Suwayda'.
There was a girl there who talked about having children that she had left behind as youths. And, you know, this girl said to her mother, "I have a beautiful house, more beautiful than your house, and I have children."

When her mother tried to get her to eat she refused food, insisting instead that she wanted to take care of her children. She would often say that she had another family. The first thing she said was, "I have a girl, her name is Amal."

"The first thing?", I asked.

The first thing because she died between my hands .... The last time someone came to her it was me. But, we are educated and so, you know, we were not [pause] we did not go to the village in order to see her .... But my grandmother went. (1996.06.18)

It is apparent here that there was some hesitation on the part of Amal's family to act on the rumors and stories that were circulating about the young girl. There is clearly some ambivalence about being too quick to accept that a reincarnation has occurred. Amal's grandmother, however, did not feel so constrained and went to the girl's village to investigate the rumors. When she first went to see the girl, she was not permitted to see her because her father said she was too ill to receive visitors.

The girl was very ill. And consequently, the father of the girl ...

"... In her head or in her body?", I interjected.

Psychologically ill. Psychologically, not in her body. Because of these problems that I am relating. Her father was a teacher. He said to his daughter, "how can I take my daughter to someone's house and say to the people there 'she is your mother'?"

He was right. Perhaps my family would not have accepted this. Of course different people see things differently. But when the girl got better, then my
grandmother returned, but again did not see this little girl.

After approximately a year and a half passed, I do not recall exactly how long, the girl improved greatly. The girl, you see, she was going to begin kindergarten, which is required. Yet she refused to go because she was obsessed with concerns about her children, she remembered her children .... Her uncle arrived from a trip working abroad. And the uncle said to the girl's father, "you must take the girl to the place she keeps describing."

"She had no concentration?", I asked.

Yeah, she wasn't able to concentrate at school. She thought about her children. She didn't think about her studies, or her father, or her mother, nor her grandfather, nor her siblings. Then they came here with her. (1996.06.18)

Amal's story implies with greater force than Abu Qasim's story the emotional difficulty sometimes faced by children and their families who are having difficulty reconciling present and past. At many points in Amal's story, the father of Lamis (the young girl, Amal's reincarnated mother) tries to protect his daughter and others from any emotional turmoil by preventing a meeting between his daughter and Amal's family. Because Amal's mother had died suddenly, prematurely young, and with several young children at home, many people would say to Amal and her siblings, "god-willing your mother is reincarnated, certainly she is reincarnated." In such cases, when a parent dies suddenly and their soul is reincarnated, their first and most pressing concern is said to be their children, and that is thus who they remember and
recognize most clearly. In Amal's words, "when someone dies it is said that when they are created again, they will surely know their children." Lamis, long before circumstances led her to Amal's family, would often talk about her children, that is, Amal and her siblings. She would even mention names and attributes of her children. When Lamis's father was finally convinced by his brother (Lamis's paternal uncle) to seek out the people about whom his daughter was obsessed, the word went out in the community. "Who died in Jeremana, with a daughter named Amal, and a daughter named Semah who has very long and curly hair?"

But before Lamis's father was convinced by his brother to initiate the search for Amal's family, he did all he could to protect his daughter, and others who might be affected, from any emotional turmoil that pursuit of the matter might cause. He thought the best thing to do was to let the matter die, to prevent contact between families, in anticipation of his daughter growing out of this phase of obsession with a previous, other life. He tried to convince his daughter that it would not be an easy thing to do, to search for her other family. He tried to have her imagine people's possible responses, asking her, "how can I take my daughter to a place and say to them, 'she is your mother'?"
In telling this part of the story, Amal agrees, adding, "maybe we wouldn't have accepted that. Not everybody sees things the same way." There is clearly ambivalence about reincarnation, despite it being a central tenet for the sect. Some people think that a respect for and belief in reincarnation is fading with every generation, especially with the recent generations, many of whom are leaving the villages for Suwayda', Damascus, the Gulf States and beyond. This is precisely the sentiment that Um Yasir expressed when I spoke with her in Salkhad, a village not far from Suwayda' known for its tasty apple varieties and juicy grapes. She was in her late forties when I visited her, and was said to be the reincarnated mother of an elder man in his seventies whom I often visited during my fieldwork, Saeed. Saeed had brought me to meet Um Yasir because he knew I was curious to know more about reincarnation apart from what sheikhs had to say about it. Among other things, Um Yasir said,

This new generation does not believe [in reincarnation], especially the educated ones, the young men, my daughter [a teacher].
"All of them? Don't some of them believe?", I asked her.
"Yeah, yeah, but when they grow up, they go out, like to Suwayda'. You see them." (1996.06.13)

Um Yasir clearly feels that with each succeeding generation, a belief in reincarnation is fading.
Particularly among the more educated class and people who
are leaving the villages, even if only for the provincial capital of Suwayda'.

Part of the reason there is some hesitation for even Druze individuals to immediately accept the legitimacy of a rebirth story, the kind that so many Druze children come up with between the ages of three and seven, is because these stories are not a "familiar genre", at least not in the present, after thirty years of Ba'ath party rule. Also, reincarnation is not common in Islam. Only a very few Shi'a-derived sects claim reincarnation exists. Syria is a country that is approximately 85% Sunni Muslim, with a President from a religious minority (Alawite) who has ruled with a heavy hand for twenty-five years. Asad's Ba'ath Party regime has been effective in muting Syria's multiplicity of religious and ethnic groups through working hard to perpetuate an ideology that Syria is a country of unified Arab-Muslim-socialist citizenry. Any open discussion or expression of religious or ethnic differences is uncomfortable at best. There are Christian churches and Shi'ite mosques in Syria, but there is a pervasive discomfort and guardedness nonetheless surrounding issues of difference in Ba'ath-ruled Syria. In this political and religious context, rebirth stories are anything but a familiar genre, in contrast to their ubiquity in India.
Consider Gupta's comment and its implications for the Syrian context: "the circulation of these stories itself depends on (and creates) an acknowledgment of both their possibility and authenticity" (1992:189). There is a circulation of rebirth stories among the Druze, but in the context of contemporary Syria, it is a problematic genre, and has become muted for the time being. Rebirth stories in Syria are nowhere near ubiquitous as in India, which grossly impedes any potential to allow the stories’ possibility and authenticity. This is due to both religious and political context constraining these stories becoming a "familiar genre" to the degree that they are in India.

Reincarnation for the Druze is not about happy reunions. It is about reconciling the past and the present, something that always involves some kind of accommodation. It is often an emotionally fraught and difficult situation for the families involved to manage. Moreover accommodation and reconciliation generally imply compromises, both emotional and practical. For Amal, this meant some restraint on her part in order to protect the child who seems to have been the vehicle, or "shirt", for her mother's soul. Despite young Lamis’s certainty, that she had found the home and the children about whom she had been so concerned, Amal and her siblings did not address her as
mother, nor treat her as though she were in fact their mother, which they felt worked to protect Lamis as well as Amal's family. Amal's family accepted her, treated her with gentleness, and were often dumbfounded and amazed with little things Lamis would say and do that reminded them so much of their mother. But, they held back, and tried to treat her like just another little girl.

We do not love her like we loved our mother. There are not those kinds of feelings, those emotions.... We love her, because she is a child. You know what I mean? ... I don't say to her, "mama" ... because she needs to live her life like a child, naturally, without anxiety. (1996.06.18)

This was done mostly for Lamis's benefit, although certainly it made things less difficult emotionally for Amal's family to not relate to her as their mother.

They, as well as Lamis's father, have tried to protect Lamis as much as possible from the clashing of her two worlds. They wanted to do what was in her best interest, to enable her to live as untroubled a childhood as possible. At first her father thought it was best to wait until his daughter grew out of the stage where she was obsessed with her other family. Often a child will go through a period where they talk about another family, akin to the universal imaginary playmate stage, a stage that passes eventually. Abu Qasim's son, for example, passed through such a period.
For Abu Qasim's son, the stage passed smoothly, unlike with Lamis for whom the feelings of obsession and anxiety intensified to the point where she could not attend kindergarten.

When Amal's grandmother heard the rumors about the village girl who spoke about her grandchildren, Amal and Semah, she went to the village to investigate. But the first time she went to the village, Lamis's father would not permit Amal's grandmother to see the girl. He said it was because the girl was ill and not in the condition for a visit. At this time, Amal reports, Lamis was "psychologically ill." She links whatever mental disturbance Lamis had to the experience of her divided self. It was only when she was able to integrate her divided selves that she could return to living a normal childhood.

Another reason Lamis's father prevented this early meeting was due to the fact that, as Amal pointed out to me, he felt that his daughter's excesses regarding her past life had become the stuff of ridicule and gossip. He felt uncomfortable imagining the stigmatization his daughter's behavior might continue to bring to him and his family. As Amal said,

People were laughing about the affair. When my grandmother went to see the child, she was ill. And the father was anxious about the whole thing. He said, "I
don't want anyone to see my daughter. My daughter needs
to forget everything". (1996.06.18)

But afterward, after Lamis had met Amal's family and
established a relationship with them, she began to get
better, and was able to return to school and integrate with
other children her age. Her father later regretted having
thwarted an early meeting between Amal's grandmother and his
daughter. Amal related the following.

Afterward he said, "if only she had met you! If only I
had allowed that!" But he was ashamed that we might,
that we might have wanted some money or something. He
was ashamed and embarrassed. (1996.06.18)

In my fieldnotes I noted that "occasionally there is the
suspicion that someone claims a *taqammus* [reincarnation]
relationship to have a bond with a rich or high status
family" (1996.02.21). Amal thought the avoidance of the
girl's father was in part due to obligations that might
potentially arise from the relationship between their
families. One might ask how similar, in terms of financial
obligations, are relationships that related/blood kin have
to those that arise through a relationship that involves
reincarnation? As within any close family, people sometimes
help out with money as part of the relationships *taqammus*
can engender. Although the use of kin terms is common in
reincarnated relationships, that alone is not sufficient
indication that familial obligation exists. There is a
liberal use of kin terms of address used as a form of endearment outside of strictly kin relationships, such as ones I applied to me within different families. I asked Amal, in the context of Lamis's father’s hesitation, whether there were sometimes people who took advantage of these kinds of reincarnation-based relationships, whether there were opportunists.

No, there aren’t, but he was embarrassed, shy you know. He started thinking about all the possibilities. Maybe we were angry. Or maybe we were sad because he knew about our story. He had heard that afterward my father died, and that we had a difficult life. He said, “I did not want to increase the pain, maybe the girl would forget.” But the girl did not forget anything, she persisted. (1996.06.18)

Although Amal discounts the possibility of opportunists where reincarnation is concerned, it is something about which people are occasionally suspicious. I was told about a friend’s father being approached by a woman claiming she was his reincarnated mother, but she failed to convince him. Her language of testimony, perhaps, was weak. The man who was approached was a prosperous factory owner, and there was some suspicion that the woman’s intentions were not genuine. In the story Amal told me, Lamis’s father hesitated to have his daughter meet Amal’s family because he wanted to protect his daughter, but not just from potential opportunists. He also wanted to protect his family, and Amal’s family as
well, from emotional pain and discomfort that might arise from the burden of social obligation. Stevenson’s thoughts on this question reflect what I too found to be the case regarding the potential gain as well as emotional strain that might arise in “solved” cases (as Stevenson refers to them), as in the case where Amal’s family is reunited with Lamis.

With rare exceptions, the subject and his family have nothing to gain by his claim to remember a previous life; and sometimes they have much to lose, especially if the memories bring disharmony within the family or quarrels with others outside it. (Stevenson 1980:345)

By the end of my fieldwork I had come to the conclusion that the issue of reincarnation is, for those people who must determine whether or not to integrate it into their lives, an extremely bittersweet one, with an emphasis on the less pleasant aspects of the experience.

**Some Humor**

Despite the bittersweet nature of reincarnation, it is something that can be turned around for comic effect. Once I was visiting with some friends in Jeremana, a suburb of Damascus, and I asked whether they had plans to visit their cousin down in Suwayda’. This particular cousin was not one of my friends’ favorite relatives. In reply to my question about plans for a visit, one of them replied that yes,
perhaps they would go visit their cousin ... in another
generation (bijeel thani). My two friends told me that this
reincarnation joke is one you hear people use frequently,
particularly when they need to fulfill some social
obligation that they would prefer to put off for a while,
say perhaps a lifetime. Stevenson reports another instance
of the principle of reincarnation used to comic effect:

In an argument between two Druses ... one was
advocating the merits of his political party so
fervently that his adversary remarked: "Be careful! You
may be reborn in our party next time." To this the
first man replied with some insight: "Well, if that
happens, I shall be an equally fanatical supporter of
it!" (Stevenson 1980:7)

Doctrinal Underpinnings of Reincarnation

According to Druze doctrine, a person is made of body
and soul. While the body belongs to the physical world and
degenerates after death, the soul is eternal. At the moment
when the human body dies, the soul immediately passes on
either to another human body, always an infant (CORA 1985)
or, if the soul is ready, it progresses beyond human
existence and on toward one of seven stages of increasing
closeness to God. The notion that there are seven phases or
stages to reincarnation is consistent with Islamic views in
general of divinity. It is also said that, at least while
it still inhabits a human form, the soul is always reborn as
the same gender. The corporeal existence with which we are familiar is considered merely the first stage (of seven) on a soul's journey. On occasion I was given a literal description of the seven stages, and was told that people are reincarnated seven discrete times. This begs the paradox of numbers. Since the Druze are a closed sect, and for ten centuries have not accepted converts, seven generations does not account for the real passage of time nor the real number of Druze individuals that have existed since their inception. This, however, is a false paradox, one that exists perhaps to confuse outsiders. Let us not forget, after all, Foucault's well-known rendering, and emphasis throughout his work, on the fact that knowledge is power. Withholding access to religious knowledge enables this small sect to protect itself from a scrutiny that it might not want. Keeping certain kinds of knowledge off limits to outsiders protects them from certain kinds of impositions of external power, such as the power to de-legitimize them. Because they are considered heterodox Muslims, they always face the risk of sanction from other Muslims. This is an uncomfortable position generally for any minority, marginalized group.

The notion of seven stages in reincarnation is not meant to be taken literally.
I asked, what happens after the seventh reincarnation. My [literal] understanding ... of it was wrong. It's not that the Druze are reborn seven times in this world, but rather, they can be reincarnated in this world one hundred times, until they progress past this, the first stage in existence, the first level (first floor, tabeg) to the second level, in which only part of your body/corporeality is still there -- you are on your way to becoming pure 'aql (mind, rationality), which is reached at the seventh stage only, bathed in a golden light. (1995.10.20)

Some time later, I was visiting with another friend who had previously discussed with me a more literal version of seven earthly reincarnations. When I related to her what I had recently heard (excerpted above), "she acknowledged that I had this knowledge, and then added, 'yes, sometimes a soul lives only one time in this life', adding, 'I can't believe I'm saying this'" (1995.11.12). She felt she had caught herself in a compromising position, revealing a secret of the sect to an outsider.

The Druze sect is known to be a secretive one. The objective of my field research was not to go out and "discover" their religious secrets10. In my mind, religious secrets were not only not what I was interested in, but something I considered not within my rightful purview, a question of ethics. Moreover, such a focus would merely be

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10 These texts have already been published and have been in the public domain for non-Druze to see at least since deSacy (1838). Druze will say that an understanding of these esoteric texts is possible only to the initiated. Their publication is not approved, but it is not ultimately seen as a threat.
perpetuating Orientalist fascination with the exotic, chasing down some tenaciously guarded religious secrets, akin to Richard Burton's masquerading as a pilgrim to view Mecca during the Hajj. It did not interest me. Why the sect developed the need for secrecy, on the other hand, is a pointed question, one that is linked to a history of persecution and marginality.

But because I became so interested in reincarnation, I inadvertently came up against the issue of secrecy and occasionally encountered some guardedness. This guardedness was not due only to religious secrecy. It sometimes had to do with an individual's desire not to re-hash an uncomfortable and disconcerting moment in their past, when their selves were divided. It had also to do with a stigma associated with the phenomenon in the context of how it is perceived by most Muslims, and Christians for that matter. In southern Syria, reincarnation is one of the markers that indicates a specifically Druze topic. Damascenes joke condescendingly about the quaint Druze belief in reincarnation, and al-Azhar censures them for it. Some Druze consider it a troublesome and unfortunate aspect of their sect because it is something that gets in the way of outsiders understanding the premium based on rationality, not "superstitions", that underlies their religious
philosophy. It gets in the way because it is perceived as exotic and strange, especially in the context of mainstream Islam. When I would bring up the topic of reincarnation, most people were quick to point out that the Druze are not alone in holding a belief in the phenomenon. People would rattle off sensational stories they had read about or seen on the television about murderous lovers being reincarnated. They would tell me about crimes and other mysteries that were solved through the revelations of a reincarnated individual, usually the victim of some heinous event.

At first when we got on the topic of reincarnation she said, "oh, I saw a program about that on television four or five years ago, a program from the USA where a married couple kept marrying each other in different lives, and the one spouse kept killing the other spouse." (1995.11.25)

On the subject of taqammus (reincarnation) he quickly went to relate a story I keep hearing about a married couple who murders each other twice or some such sensational thing people have seen on television .... But mentioning natiq seems to elicit an "oh, you mean Druze reincarnation" reaction. Maybe taqammus is too broad [to elicit specifically Druze stories about reincarnation]. (1996.01.20)

These responses to my inquiry were not atypical. I came to interpret this kind of response as both a deflection away from the topic of reincarnation among the Druze specifically as well as a defensive posture that worked to place them within a larger world context of believers in reincarnation, rather than as some isolated group with a
peculiar, even stigmatized, belief. On the one hand, the effort was made to not talk directly about the Druze case. But if we did, it would first be made clear that they were not alone in what unsympathetic outsiders (i.e., other Syrians, both Muslim and Christian) often consider a bizarre belief. Goffman (1963) insightfully points out that that what constitutes "stigma", or spoiled identity, is not simply the possession of a particular attribute, such as holding a belief in reincarnation, or an individual holding a job considered "below their station". Stigma does not exist in a vacuum. To understand the process of stigmatization, it is necessary to recognize the language of relationships that revolve around stigma, not simply what specific attributes are stigmatized. "An attribute that stigmatizes one type of possessor can confirm the usualness of another, and therefore is neither creditable nor discreditable as a thing in itself" (1963:3). If the point is obliquely made that in much of Asia, Hindus and Buddhists believe in reincarnation, the implication is clearly that reincarnation in and of itself is not universally discreditable. Thus it was not uncommon when the topic of reincarnation came up in Druze company that I would be given stories of reincarnation that did not involve Druze individuals, but would rather tend first to make mention of
the centrality of reincarnation in Hindu and Buddhist doctrine. Besides the fact that this deflection reflects the management of both secrecy and stigmatization, it also raises the question of what similarities and differences exist between the most well-known models of reincarnation, the Hindu and Buddhist models, and the lesser known Druze model. The most significant differences between the Druze versus other conceptions of reincarnation include the following:

(1) No Karma. In Druze reincarnation, *karma* is not the driving engine determining the nature of a soul’s rebirth;

(2) Human (or Higher) Rebirth Only. The possibility that a soul might transfer to a nonhuman corporeal existence does not exist in the Druze belief. In the process of reincarnation, a Druze is only reborn in human form, unless the soul is ready/prepared to move beyond human/corporeal existence.

(3) Immediate Rebirth. When a person dies, their soul is simultaneously reborn into the body of an infant. The soul does not hover but instantly finds a new “shirt”, or body. In most other models, a soul can hover for months or years before rebirth.

(4) Gender Retained Across Rebirths. When souls are reborn, males remain males and females remain females.

The cycle of reincarnation is said to be driven by peoples’ rationality, by the choices they make in the lives they lead. There is great priority placed on the notion of human choice and rationality in Druze theosophy. The notion that a soul might enter a non-human corporeal form after
death is totally rejected. The reasoning is that since one lifetime is so short in the scheme of things, it is not sufficient grounds for judgement. As Shavit explains,

It would be unjust for the soul, which has been given the choice to improve from one life to another, to be judged after a single death and rendered animal, plant, or thing. [A soul's] punishment or reward must be granted only on the Day of Judgement .... People pass through a series of lives as they move towards perfection or doom, and in each life they are given the chance to change their direction. (1993:124-125)

As previously mentioned, it is commonly considered to be the case that reincarnation usually involves a sudden and unexpected death, thus one in which the soul is taken by surprise, and not prepared to move on to the next level of its existence. Unlike the four points listed above, sudden and violent deaths being a factor in reincarnation is shared across many cultures (see Table 4.1). Despite some shared characteristics, Druze reincarnation is markedly different from the Hindu model, a system which is fueled by karma, and which includes different levels of sentient existence, from animal to human and beyond. Karma is absolutely irrelevant in the Druze conception of reincarnation. It makes no difference how one lived their life in terms of what subsequent lives will be like. There is no cosmic scorecard along the lines determined by karma. Being human is considered the first of seven levels of the soul's
existence. Souls exist and are reincarnated in human form, until they are ready to move on to subsequent planes of existence, each with increasing closeness to divinity. Stevenson's findings confirm this notion that how a Druze individual lives their life has little or no direct bearing on the circumstances of their subsequent lives.

There is no suggestion of a kind of automatic self-administration of justice from one life to another such as one finds (or can read into) the concept of karma in Hinduism and Buddhism. In my own experience Druses rarely speculate about the processes or the circumstances of birth and rebirth. These matters are all in the hands of God. I have observed a marked difference between the conversations among the Druses about the connections between one life and another and those among educated Hindus and Buddhists. When Hindus and Buddhists discuss reincarnation, they assume that karma enters into it; but in Lebanon and Syria one almost never hears references to a similar concept among the Druses. (Stevenson 1980:6-7)

So, in stark contrast to the Hindu and Buddhist models, the quality of one's life does not predetermine the nature of subsequent reincarnations. Also, one is never reincarnated as any kind of being lower than a human. A Druze is almost always reincarnated as a Druze, and retains gender across human incarnations.

Broadly speaking, reincarnation functions to help maintain the unity and social cohesiveness of a largely closed community. It brings together unrelated families, across class, from different villages, towns, and even
countries. It should be reiterated here that the Druze sect is an exclusive one, it neither accepts nor seeks converts\textsuperscript{11}. Furthermore, marriage outside the sect is forbidden. This is an issue of sect doctrine. There is ongoing heated debate in the Druze community regarding outmarriage, since it has been happening with increasing frequency with the growing mobility of current and recent generations\textsuperscript{32}. The sheikhs (old man, chief, head, senator) point out that the sect has been closed since shortly after its inception, that the community maintains itself through reincarnation, which is meant to explain and buttress the sanction against outmarriage. Marrying outside the sect is seen as a threat to the long-term integrity of the community. This is the official explanation for reincarnation as well as the sanction against outmarriage.

According to Druze doctrine, all human souls were created in one moment, and their number is fixed for all time. When a Druze individual dies, his or her soul immediately is reborn in another body. In some cultural models of reincarnation, as Stevenson points out, the soul is not necessarily reborn immediately, it can linger for many years before rebirth. Immediate rebirth distinguishes

\textsuperscript{11} Islam welcomes converts, yet one more thing that sets the Druze apart from other Muslims.
the Druze reincarnation, in comparative perspective. The body that a soul enters is conceived as being an envelope or robe of the soul (Abu-Izzedin 1993:116), a point that is reflected linguistically. A soul, according to Druze doctrine, never enters an animal form. Debasement into animal form as punishment occurs in other reincarnation models, but not for the Druze. “The process of transmigration goes on to the end of time. In the process souls rise through their attachment to the truth to a higher degree of excellence, or deteriorate by neglecting the teachings of religion” (ibid). The aim is unity with a supreme being, “communion with the One”, the essence of the search for meaning in the Tawhid faith. An essential feature of all of this is the premium Druze place on their own freedom of choice in living their lives, and the related importance their faith places on rationality. Souls are all created with an equal tendency to good and evil (ibid), and have freedom of choice in choosing thus. An omniscient God knows what an individual will choose, but a person’s choice is not foreordained. This is an interesting twist in a cultural region so imbued with the concept of life being all about one’s fate, as per the will of God. But official explanations are more or less beside the point when it comes

32 See Chapter Five for discussion of the debate about outmarriage in
to a family dealing with a child who talks obsessively about his or her other family, sometimes to the point of rejecting membership in the current natal family, or when a family encounters an individual who claims to be a deceased sibling or parent. Reincarnation stories are not just stories about happy reunions, they almost always involve some emotional turmoil, conflict, and confusion.

**Summary: Reincarnation as Everyday Lived Experience**

Shavit claims that taqammus (reincarnation) and natq (coll., remembering past lives) are ideas that permeate Druze behavior and attitude.

When Druzes encounter actual cases of natq among themselves, members of that settlement are led to marvel over the unity and supreme power of the Creator .... Experiences of such a phenomenon cause Druzes to become more convinced that their identity is not only a matter of personal choice. Second, the treatment of others outside the community is constrained by awareness that one could become a member of that group or competing family in one's next life. Finally, this phenomenon regulates the bipolar competition within Druze communities, toward constructiveness and cooperation, rather than viciousness. (1993:125-126)

The cases discussed in this chapter offer examples of how reincarnation functions socially to help maintain unity and social cohesiveness within the Druze sect, which has long been a minority, both in religious and political contexts.
As Shavit implies, reincarnation helps to bridge across existing factionalisms that may exist, as well as builds bridges across class divides and geographical space, as well as across cycles of time.

Taking Geertz's advice, I elide the science/religion debate that is concerned about whether reincarnation can be "proven" or not. The concern here is in the fact that it has concrete social effects both on families and communities. Among other things, reincarnation functions in Druze society to bring together members of unrelated families who otherwise would never have cause to know one another. Reciprocal social relations ensue from these "reincarnated" relationships that are not blood based in an immediate sense, though these relationships do indeed take on some of the parameters of kinship. Moreover, it is assumed that a reincarnated individual is in fact "pure" Druze, effectively obviating the question of blood ties. Kin terms are used to refer to individuals who claim to be reincarnated kin. Though in a sense it is a matter of choice. Not all members of a family who is approached by an individual are equally receptive to reincarnated kin. At the same time, many lifelong reincarnated kin relationships are maintained. Regular visits occur, gifts are exchanged, sometimes financial assistance is involved.
Reincarnation is also tied up with explanations of why Druze should not marry outside of the sect, and is linked with discussions of "purity" of the blood (i.e., to marry out is to compromise the purity of the Druze community at large). But official explanations are more or less beside the point when it comes to a family dealing with a child who talks obsessively about his or her other family, sometimes to the point of rejecting membership in the current natal family, or when a family encounters an individual who claims to be a deceased sibling or parent. Reincarnation stories are not just stories about happy reunions, they almost always involve some emotional turmoil and conflict. Besides being a phenomenon that creates tension in terms of how it is understood at religious and scientific levels, it is also a phenomenon that works on a social level to contribute to the strength and maintenance of the Druze community in general.
CHAPTER FIVE: MARRIAGE, OUTMARRIAGE, AND THE IMAGINED COMMUNITY

In an anthropological spirit, then, I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community -- and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. 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, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. (Anderson 1983:15)

Of fundamental importance within the Druze community are norms regarding marriage within certain group boundaries. Although not specified in their legal code, their religious doctrine prohibits marriage outside the sect. This may be largely understood as a rational adaptation to the hostile environment in which the Divine Call took place. At several different times in their early history, adherents to the new faith were forced to go underground and finally to "close the door" of the cult, prohibiting further conversion. Lacking the possibility of recruiting members from outside, sectarian endogamy is one of the few ways the group may cope with both immediate threats to their existence and a more gradual dilution of their boundaries through marriage with nonmembers. The Druze have had an insecure existence throughout most of their history, a fact which rendered exogamous marriage a hazardous practice and has promoted the emergence of such a proscriptive marriage rule. (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:79)

Chapter Overview

In Syria and across the Arab world generally, marriage is seen as a family and community affair, rather than an individual one. Of course that is not to say that tension between individuals and their families never occurs when potential marriage arrangements are discussed but, as a rule, marriage is seen explicitly as a union of families, an
institution that perpetuates inter-familial and communal bonds, and as such it produces clearly bounded populations.

One way to view marriage is in a classic Marxian sense, in that marriage controls populations through reproduction, both literal reproduction as well as ideological reproduction. This chapter is an attempt to determine the nature of the ideologies being reproduced, as well as challenged and altered, through the debate that is ongoing in the Druze community regarding marriage and outmarriage. This topic is a productive one because it brings to the fore a consideration of the different internal and external pressures that have existed for the Druze sect in Syria.

The aim of this chapter is three-fold. First, my overarching concern is in elucidating the nature of the imagined community that various Druze ideologies of marriage imply. How do ideologies of marriage reflect Druze notions of identity and ethnicity? This chapter presents a range of opinions that people held on the topic, the context out of which these notions arose, and the implications of these views in terms of imagined communities (Anderson 1983) and population management.

Second, I discuss the claim that a special, more egalitarian, status is (at least potentially) afforded to
Druze women in contrast to other Muslim women by virtue of some specific provisions in Druze family law which differ in several specific respects from shari'a, Islamic law. It has been claimed by outsiders and Druze apologists that Druze family law is "surprisingly advanced" (Layish 1982:20) in comparison to aspects of Muslim shari'a family law. Because of these differences in family law, the further claim has been made that Druze women have a "special status" compared with Christian or other Muslim women (ibid). Part of the effort of this chapter explores the nature of these claims, and whether and how they play out in everyday life. In other words, what is the difference between theory (law) and practice (everyday life) that has existed for Druze women because of their family law? It is my contention that the basis for making claims about Druze women's "special status" is inherently problematic, and is akin to misguided efforts of some scholarship (both Western and Druze) that attempts to set the Druze apart from other Arabs and Muslims as categorically and essentially different, at both a physical ("racial origins" (Abu-Izzedin 1993; Hitti 1928))

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3The position of [Druze] women in the family in the context of personal status under religious law ... is surprisingly advanced .... Let us only mention here, as an example, that polygamy is forbidden and that a woman divorced without legal cause is entitled to half her husband's property or to compensation for the moral or material damage done to her." (Layish 1982:19-20)
and philosophical ("gender ideology more Western" (Layish 1983)) level. In my view, it is a discourse that is mostly an outsiders’ or apologists’ construction.

Also I would claim that the argument made for Druze women’s special status is less about women than it is an effort to construct the Druze as exceptional and as such, to exacerbate difference between them and the Sunni majority. I claim this for two reasons. First, among Sunni Muslims in Syria, polygamy is rare, estimated at only one percent in Damascus 34, although it is permitted by religious law. Second, in the discourse I collected about marriage, the issue of polygamy versus monogamy was rarely raised. The same issues that bear on women’s status among Syrian Christian and Sunni communities hold for Druze women. In this region generally, the choice of spouse has long been more a familial than an individual decision, and the reverberations and intricacies of this were the main focus of the discourse on marriage that I collected. The Druze women whom I knew never talked about being women with a special status compared to their Christian and Sunni compatriots. This was a matter for Druze apologists and

34 "The level of polygyny has been found to be as low as one percent in Damascus, two percent in Cairo, with most estimates putting it at no more than ten percent. In a review of the levels of polygyny in Arab countries, Chamie finds that "polygyny is practiced by a comparatively
outsiders commenting on Druze "uniqueness" to make. Certainly this is not to say that there is something noteworthy about the differences that exist in family law, but interpretations based on theory/law should be qualified by a close look at everyday practice.

The third focus and the anthropological heart of this chapter, is an attempt to understand the nature of the debate within the community itself regarding marriage and outmarriage, using cases that were discussed during my fieldwork in order to illustrate how some families and individuals both manage and imagine populations. Several questions are asked, such as, how are people talking about outmarriage and dealing with it individually, as well as in their families and communities? What ideologies are invoked to bolster the Druze prohibition against marrying outside of the sect? And, conversely, what ideologies and historical understandings are used to argue against the legitimacy of the sect's outmarriage prohibition? Because of the nature of the family court system in Syria (a Druze marrying outside of the sect would not registered in Shari'a court as Druze, but as Muslim), it would be impossible to get numbers on rates of outmarriage. It became a focus in my research.

small minority of Arab Muslim men, i.e. probably by no more than twelve percent, and in most instances nearer five percent*. (Obermeyer 1992:44)
because it was a topic of much debate among the Druze I knew in Suwayda and Damascus.

**Concerning Marriage: Ideology, Community, and Endogamy**

The Druze are a small sect in a country where the affiliation of citizenship is meant to mute and override the multiple religious, sectarian, and ethnic identities that comprise Syria. This ideology is clearly illustrated in the following passage from the Constitution of the Arab Ba’th Socialist Party, the Arab nationalist party which has been in power in Syria since 1963:

> The Arab nation constitutes a cultural unity. Any differences existing among its sons are accidental and unimportant. They will disappear with the awakening of the Arab consciousness ...

> The national bond will be the only bond existing in the Arab state. It ensures harmony among the citizens by melting them in the crucible of a single nation, and combats all other forms of factional solidarity such as religious, sectarian, tribal, racial and regional factionalism. (in Van Dam 1996:15)

From the nation’s point of view then, one could say that the imagined population of Ba’th Party Syria is characterized by unity and patriotism, to the degree that talk of sectarian affiliation is largely taboo, particularly in more public contexts. This, of course, is in an effort to curb the fierce sectarianism that has plagued Syria’s Ba’th party since its inception in 1963, a sectarianism that has in
large part been forcibly controlled since President Hafez al-Asad's rise to power twenty-five years ago. But despite the regime's omnipresent rhetoric about national unity (Wedeen 1995), divisions and separations persist, and one way in which they are maintained is through the persistence of endogamous marriage.

The rules of endogamy that prevail in Arab society are, for the Druze, also a matter of sect doctrine. Marriage outside the sect is prohibited and seen to threaten the long-term integrity of the Druze population and community as a whole, and thus the topic of outmarriage is highly fraught. Even though most Druze consider themselves to be Muslims, marrying a member of the Sunni Muslim majority in Syria (or a Shi'a, 'Alawi, or Isma'ili, for that matter) is considered outmarriage from a Druze perspective, and is thus prohibited from the sect's point of view. Needless to say, the Druze also consider marrying a

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Alamuddin and Starr (1980) identified, based on Druze court records from 1931-1974 in Lebanon, several different categories of marriage based on the degree of endogamy they shared. This breakdown was done in order to examine the relative influence that different types of endogamy had upon mahr (brideprice). The categories were: "(1) exogamous marriages, partners unrelated and not from the same district; (2) village endogamous marriages, parties unrelated; (3) village endogamous marriages, parties related, that is, clan endogamy; (4) both partners of the same extended family but live in different villages; and (5) both parties from the same district but not related." (Alamuddin and Starr 1980:68-70). Note that the exogamous marriages listed first were understood to be sect endogamous, although not clan or village endogamous.
Christian to be outmarriage, and it too is similarly proscribed.

Contracts and Courts

A Muslim marriage is a contract between two parties, the signing of which is done in the presence of a sheikh and two witnesses. As such it is a relatively straightforward legal affair in which a contract is signed and witnessed, and it can occur in a private home. It is the act of signing the contract that establishes a marriage, even though the 'aqd (contract-signing ceremony) often takes place several months to a year before the actual cohabitation and consummation of a marriage.

At the contract-signing, the mahr (dowry) and its method of payment are agreed upon. The contract is signed by the bride and groom (or their representative), two witnesses, and the sheikh. The 'aqd always takes place before the zuwaj, the marriage festivities that can last three to seven days. But the legal responsibilities of the

36 There are two parts to a mahr (dowry): the mu‘ajl (what is paid up front) and the muajl (the delayed payment).

37 If, for example, the groom is living in Venezuela, his father in Syria can stand in for the groom at the 'aqid provided the father has established power of attorney. If the bride is younger than eighteen, her father too can act on her behalf in the court. In Suwayda I was told about situations in which a groom was unable to attend his zuwaj celebrations (the wedding festivities) because he lived abroad and was unable to return to Syria. The bride must stand alone in her wedding finery for several nights in a row.
male, and the legal rights of the woman begin at the contract signing. By contrast, a Christian wedding is more religiously imbued; it is considered a sacrament and requires the presence of a priest, involves communion, and cannot be done outside the institution of the church.

In Syria there are three courts that administer in matters of personal status law (marriage, inheritance, divorce): (1) Al-Mahkami al-Shar‘iyya (Personal Status Court, Religious Court), for Muslims; (2) Al-Mahkami al-Ruhiyya (literally, the Spiritual Court), for Christians; and (3) Al-Mahkami al-Methhebiyya (literally, the Sectarian Court), for Druze. After a couple completes their contract, they must register at both the appropriate religious court as well as at the Ministry of the Interior.

Al-Mahkami al-Shar‘iyya is the Islamic Shari‘a Court. These courts are found all over Syria. By contrast, the exclusively Druze court, Al-Mahkami al-Methhebiyya, has just one location, in Suwayda. When two Druze are married, the 'aqd (contract-signing) typically takes place in the home of the bride’s father, and is attended by several Druze sheikhs.

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38 Sunni Muslims sometimes bypass the registration of their contract at the religious and state courts. This arrangement is called a kitaab barani (outside arrangement) and is done for different reasons. For example, a man may not want to register a second wife. I knew of a married woman who had a kitaab barani because her job as a stewardess stipulated that she not have children or be married. The kitaab barani enabled her finagle her way around the restrictions of her job.
as well as men from each family. Some prayers are said and the contract is signed. Subsequently the contract is registered at the Druze court in Suwayda and at the Ministry of the Interior\footnote{At the Ministry of the Interior (Wuzara al-Dakhiliyya), a marriage contract (‘aqd al-zuwaj) would be registered with the Directorate}. If a question arises later regarding the terms of the contract, or regarding divorce or inheritance, Druze who reside in other parts of Syria are not necessarily required to travel to Suwayda in order to have a court hear a case. If they live, for example, in the major cities of Aleppo or Damascus, they can bring their contractual question to the local Mahkami al-Shar’iyya. This court has the authority to administer certain kinds of Druze cases. It can make rulings on Druze inheritance and divorce. In these cases the Shari’a judges apply Druze family law which differs in several specific respects from the Shari’a. Although it can rule in Druze divorce cases, the Shari’a court cannot do so for divorce cases between Christians.

Thus, a marriage between two Druze is one that is registered in the Druze religious court and the Syrian Ministry of the Interior. What about a marriage between a Druze and Sunni couple? Since the central legitimating factor of a marriage is a legal document, getting married is
actually a fairly easy thing for a Druze-Sunni couple to accomplish. A couple can ask a Sunni sheik to marry them. Typically he will attend a contract-signing at the groom’s house. A Sunni sheik typically will not ask the couple whether they are Sunni or not. In the course of the contract signing, formulaic prayers are said that reaffirm the couples’ Muslim identity. A central tenet of Islam, "bearing witness" (shahadah, saying "there is no God but God and Muhammed is his Prophet"), is part of any contract-signing. This establishes the couple as Muslims and a sheik will not push the issue.

In the eyes of the Shari’a court, this marriage is viewed as a contract between two Muslims. Furthermore, from the Shari’a court’s perspective, the Druze are not considered adherents of a separate religion, they are considered to be an Islamic sect and as such are considered Muslim. The lines of jurisdictional inclusion in Shari’a perspective are wide, and can be applied to all Muslims. In ideal circumstances, then, absolute exclusions are not made within Islam regarding who, as members, the shari’a can apply to. A Druze-Sunni marriage would be registered at

General of Civil Status, al-Shu’un al-Medani wa Ahwaal al-Shakhsiyya.
46 There are, however, those within Islam who consider the Druze sect heretical. There have been occasional fatawa (religious/legal pronouncements) coming from Al-Azhar in Egypt (one of the most revered
al-Mahkami al-Shari’a. As such it would be considered a marriage between two Muslims. The shari’a is considered a guide for living for all Muslims, and all Muslims have access to shari’a courts, regardless of sectarian affiliation. Other religious sects in Syria, the Alawi’ and Isma’ilis, register their marriage contracts at the Shari’a courts. Neither of these sects has their own court, as the Druze do.

At the Druze court in Syria, Al-Mahkami al-Methhebiyya, it would not be possible to register a marriage contract of a Druze-Sunni couple. It is not literally "against the law" of Al-Mahkami al-Methhebiyya to do this. Rather, the categorical distinction made between Druze and non-Druze that prohibits marriage outside the sect has been done at the level of doctrine. Druze family law perpetuates the boundary lines that Druze doctrine has established by only legitimizing marriage among Druzes. The lines of inclusion have been tightly drawn at the sect level. The Druze court simply will not marry a Druze-Sunni couple, as a matter of doctrine, not law.

There is no strictly civil marriage in Syria. All marriages in Syria are a matter of legal contract.

and conservative centers of Islam) proclaiming the Druze heretics, and thus not Muslim.
registered at religious court, and also registered with the state. Although considered legitimate at the shari'a and state level, a Druze-Sunni marriage is not recognized as legitimate from the Druze perspective, and would not be registered in a Druze court.

As far as the Druze individual is concerned in a Druze-Sunni marriage, the question of whether this constitutes a religious conversion arises. From the Druze community's point of view, the fact of marrying a non-Druze and registering the marriage at al-Mahkami al-Shari'a means that person has irrevocably left the sect. This is despite the fact that most Druze consider themselves Muslims in a universal sense. A Druze individual marrying someone outside of the sect requires that the marriage be registered outside of the Druze religious court. This affects the religious identity of any children the couple may have.

In the mid-1990's the Sheikh al-Aql, the religious leader of the Syrian Druze community, Sheikh Hussein Jarbua, expressed distress about rising numbers of Druze marrying outside of the sect. He claimed that there were too many Druze marrying out by virtue of the way the law was structured. Sheikh Jarbua's concerns clearly reflect a

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41 There was a case in the mid-1980's involving a man from a prominent Druze family who had married a Sunni Muslim woman in the Shari'a court, whom he later divorced. Sometime after his divorce, he wanted to marry
common perception among many in the Druze community that increasing numbers are marrying outside of the sect, and that this is weakening the community.

If a Druze wants to marry a Christian, the only option is in fact religious conversion of the Druze individual to Christianity. Civil marriage is not an option in Syria. Furthermore, a Sunni or Christian who wants to marry a Druze does not have the option to convert into the Druze sect because the sect is exclusive, it does not allow new members through conversion. This is in contrast to Islam, Judaism, and Christianity in general where conversion into each of these faiths is usually an option in the case of interfaith marriage.

a Druze woman, but a Druze sheikh refused to permit this marriage, saying the man was not a Druze, but rather a Sunni, and that he could not switch back without a court hearing at salah al-madani (where people go to make changes in their permanent state record, e.g., changes of age, name, etc.). This kind of case is rare. Because the Alawis and Isma'illis do not have their own sectarian court, as do the Druze, this issue never comes up for them. An Alawí can be married to a Sunni, divorce, and remarry an Alawí without incident. For the Druze, sectarian membership is all or nothing. Once revoked, such as by marrying out, one cannot necessarily easily became a member again, and the only way to do so has been through state court rulings in religious/sectarian identity which has proved a thorny issue for the state. At present, the Druze are not considered a separate religion, but rather are considered a Muslim sect. In the case described, the judge ruled that the Druze are Muslim, and also in part due to the family influence the man had, he was able to marry the Druze woman. There are also rare cases where a Druze man, married to a Druze woman, has a Sunni mistress. If his Sunni mistress became pregnant, he is legally able to marry her in Shari'a court. His Druze wife may or may not accept this arrangement. This is something clearly prohibited in Druze family law, but legally permitted otherwise. Although legally permitted, within the Druze community this would of course be viewed very negatively. This was an extreme case, but such cases have occurred.
In Lebanon, there is currently an ongoing debate raging about whether to adopt an optional civil marriage code. One argument proponents of civil marriage make is that having a civil marriage option would go a long way towards reducing the hypocrisy that currently reigns wherein people convert on a whim, insincerely changing religious affiliation only in order to get married\(^2\). There is the added hypocrisy that Lebanon recognizes civil marriages of Lebanese citizens that took place in other countries, to the point that divorce settlements are processed according to the civil law of the country in which the couple were married, whether it be Cyprus, the United States, or Australia. It is not uncommon for wealthy Lebanese who wish to marry but who are from different religions or sects to fly to Cyprus to be married. Betts reports that in Lebanon "the Druze courts will not register a marriage of a Druze to a non-Druze, so the only alternative is conversion to another religion" (Betts 1988:49). If a Druze does marry outside, children are either considered illegitimate (Lebanon) or are considered to be the religion of their father (Israel). Betts adds that in Syria,

\(^2\) According to historical Islamic Shari'a law, apostasy is committed by a Muslim who expressly or by indication repudiates Islam, such as by conversion. In some interpretations, apostasy is seen to be punishable by death.
Although Betts is correct in his perception that there is a high level of resistance to outmarriage expressed by many Druze in Syria, he is otherwise off base. A large portion of the Druze population in Syria does indeed reside in the muhafazat al-Suwayda, a province of small towns and agricultural villages, but the Druze are not as isolated as he depicts. The Syrian countryside, like so many other agricultural regions of the world, has been losing many of its young people to the city and non-agricultural employment. Working on the family farm has not been the option that it once was for many Syrians, and rural-urban migration has increasingly become a necessity in order to make a living\textsuperscript{43}. The most common pattern of internal

\textsuperscript{43} Statistics documenting internal migration have been scanty and problematic. Perthes pointed out that "Syrian statistics reveal little either about internal migration or labour emigration. We can assume, for instance, that a majority of the inhabitants of Greater Damascus are still registered in their villages or towns of origin where they may have some land or a family house - the discrepancy between official and semi-official data is striking .... According to the Statistical Abstracts 1993, the total population of Damascus and the Damascus countryside province did not exceed 2.9 million in that year. In 1992, Syrian media had noted that some 4.5 million persons were actually living in Greater Damascus. Official data on the proportion of rural to urban inhabitants - according to which the urban population increased from 43 percent of the total in 1970 to 47 percent in 1981 and 50.4 percent in 1991 - are therefore indicative of the direction of internal
migration for the Druze is from muhafazat al-Suwayda to Damascus, 100 kilometers to the north. Perthes estimates an annual flow of rural-urban migrants to Damascus at 50,000 to 100,000 per year, adding that the four main incentives for migration are the search for employment, military service, higher education, and family members joining their breadwinners (Perthes 1995:94).

If a Druze man or woman marries outside of the sect, what most commonly happens is an "excommunication" from both family and community. Usually families refuse contact with the individual, although relations sometimes renew gradually once the couple starts having children.

Samira has an older sister that is never even mentioned. She has such a nice, close family but this daughter is essentially excommunicated. People know about this, outside the family, and at the mention of the fact of it, are not surprised -- that she is basically excommunicated. (17.05.96)

She is married to a Muslim, he's a musician. So that's why I never see Nejat, nor is she ever talked about. Nejat has been alienated from her family as a result of her marriage [to a Muslim]. There are no children yet, and it must be a big relief to have Mejdulina [another sister in the family] engaged to a boy from the Jebel (from Salkhad or nearby). (13.03.96)

A said M is visiting Suwayda more, his mother is receiving him because he has promised he will divorce [his Muslim wife], though he still lives in Damascus, and she [his wife] is often with him. (25.03.96)
During my fieldwork, I encountered families who would not mention the name of a family member who had married out. I recall being taken by surprise when I first realized the extent of the repudiation and shame that outmarriage could bring, after having known one particular family for a year before being told by an outsider about the daughter they had never mentioned to me who was living in Damascus with her Sunni husband.

In cases of outmarriage, the burden of potential excommunication is placed more heavily on women. Because generally sons are favored over daughters, it is more likely that a son who marries out will be welcomed back sooner than a daughter.

The progeny of interfaith marriages were said to have the chance to repair the loss an outmarriage had caused if, when the time came for the child of an interfaith couple to marry, they chose to marry a Druze, thus coming back to fold. The children of these marriages (i.e., grandchildren of the the original mixed couple marriage) would then be considered fully Druze. The breach their grandparent had made will have been seen to be repaired.

My fieldwork took place in the context of working class Syria. What I say in this chapter about the management of marriage (for example, that Druze who outmarry are
essentially excommunicated) does not necessarily apply among emigrant Druze populations nor, for that matter, among the more powerful and wealthy, often transnational, Druze in Syria or Lebanon (including prominent members of the Atrash family). Druze with a certain amount of class privilege were able to move with relative ease around the sect's rules about marriage, and were unintimidated by potential strictures their actions might invite.

A talked about double standards, M and A2 marrying out without major problems because of their high status. He said that invariably of all those who do marry out, they all end up unhappy. He said, "They say M is not happy and regrets his decision to marry out". If someone marries out, they are said to be "leaving their religion", tarak. Outcasts. If a Druze marries out and has children, and if the kids marry a Druze they are accepted back as Druze, if not they are forever gone. (30.01.96)

The above quote, from a financially successful Druze merchant, pointed out that a double standard seemed to apply to the prominent and prestigious, but albeit nonetheless felt that outmarriage ultimately results in unhappiness.

**Outmarriage was heatedly discussed ...**

Outmarriage was heatedly discussed across generations during the course of my fieldwork. Circumstance had caused it to become a "forced issue", one that people were having to deal with whether they wanted to or not. Its recent rise
was attributed to several factors, including: the increasing mobility of the young generation, the dearth of marriageable men due to economic outmigration, and young peoples' difficulty reconciling "love marriages" with traditional expectations to marry endogamously. Almost every family I came in contact with had one or more of its male adult members working abroad, most commonly in the Gulf States or Venezuela. The result of this was a keenly felt dearth of marriageable men for the Druze women who remained in Syria.

In addition to external movement/economic outmigration, there has been internal/incountry mobility of current and recent generations of young Druze who have been attending the universities of Damascus, Aleppo, and Lattakia in increasing numbers compared with their parents, especially in the case of women. In the current generation, young Druze women are generally not discouraged from attending university. For the most part, those who do attend the university stay in strictly sex-segregated university dormitories, in rooms with several roommates often from all over Syria. At the university many of these young Druze adults encounter their fellow Syrians in a more intimate fashion than they had previously. In this context they often find themselves having to explain what the Druze sect is to curious compatriots, whether it is its own
religion or not, what their beliefs are, whether they really believe in reincarnation, and so on. While attending the university, the exposure and intermingling with other Syrians who are not Druze sometimes results in romantic liaisons that lead to marriage. Just one generation ago, this scenario would have been much less likely to occur. Fifteen or twenty years ago, Druze women who wished to attend the university tended to live at home and commute only to attend classes and take exams; they did not have nearly the same mobility and exposure to other Syrians as the current generation. This increase in mobility among young Druze, coupled with an already diminished number of marriageable Druze men who have outmigrated for economic reasons, has brought the issue of outmarriage to the fore.

Ranges of Local Theory: Doctrine and Anti-Doctrine

Across the spectrum of Druze thought on the issue one can find models of blood-based “racial purity” promulgated by some to support the ban on outmarriage, while at the other end of the spectrum are those who see eradicating the prohibition against outmarriage as the only way to facilitate national as well as pan-Arab unity. In Lebanon, one supporter of the civil marriage proposal currently under debate expressed a similar view, that interfaith marriage
was the only way to achieve cohesion in a divided society: "Butros said he'd always known he would marry outside his own faith 'because otherwise we'll never have national cohesion in this country'" (9/14/98, The Daily Star, Beirut). Butros is a Maronite Christian, and his wife is a Sunni Muslim.

The question of how to accommodate (or not) interfaith marriages is, of course, not an exclusively Syrian Druze issue. Far from it. In neighboring Lebanon, a debate about legitimizing civil marriages has been ongoing since President Hrawi proposed at his 1997 end-of-the-year address that Lebanon enact an Optional Personal Status Code, otherwise known as the optional civil marriage law. The debate over Hrawi's proposal has been lively, controversial, and embittered. As of January, 1999, the proposal is yet to be voted on in Lebanon's parliament.

In the meantime, in Syria there is no public debate about civil marriage like there has been in Lebanon ever since Hrawi proposed passage of an optional civil marriage law. In both countries, marriages are legitimated in exclusively religious contexts. When it comes to interfaith marriages, there is some room to maneuver (e.g., conversion, a Druze-Sunni 'aqd in the presence of a Sunni sheikh, or travelling to Cyprus to be married under civil
law). In the Syrian Druze context, double standards exist whereby it is much easier for Druze from higher status, wealthy families to marry out of the sect without suffering the kind of sanctions individuals from less fortunate circumstances might endure. This double standard is also in effect when it comes to gender, such that it is easier for a man to outmarry than for a woman. These different capabilities for maneuvering can be framed as a basic issue of Foucauldian/ Marxian social space, wherein individuals with more resources/capital have more room to move and avert practical and discursive barbs of repudiation, and are less subject to the vagaries of social ostracism. The Panopticon is more or less threatening based on one's class position.

**Doctrine**

Marriage outside of the Druze sect is considered a violation of sect doctrine. The reason for this is tied up with the notion that a discrete number of Druze "souls" was established at the inception of the sect, and that if someone marries outside of the sect, one of these "souls" is forever lost, thus threatening the long-term viability of the population. This discrete number of souls is said to be continually re-perpetuating and re-cycling itself through the process of reincarnation, one of the central tenets of
Druze theosophy (elaborated in more detail in Chapter Four). Although the Druze believe that all peoples (i.e., their souls) reincarnate, they also believe that only a Druze soul can reincarnate as a Druze soul. Also, gender remains constant across incarnations.

Druze doctrine thus ties the dictum prohibiting outmarriage to the sect's esoteric belief in reincarnation, and the related idea that there has always been a finite number of extant Druze souls. "Human souls, according to Druze belief, were created at once, their number is fixed for all time, it is not subject to diminution or increase" (Abu-Izzedin 1993:116). This also means, from the standpoint of Druze theosophy, that their population is always constant. Or, as Shavit puts it, the Druze "do not believe in global demographic change" (Shavit 1993:19).

It is interesting to note that global demographic change is not an issue for Druzes because of their belief in the transmigration of souls, and in the belief that six billion souls were created at the beginning of time. Any apparent change in statistics is, therefore, simply the arrival and departure of these souls into new places, not an actual change in the fixed number of people. (ibid, 18)

Membership in the sect is thus seen to be pre-determined. Shortly after the sect's inception, roughly one thousand years ago, the sect became closed to any new converts. Since that time, Druze doctrine has held that
people who are not born Druze can not simply join through conversion; this is a logical impossibility in terms of the fundamental theosophical principles of the sect. Because the Druze population is seen to be fixed, as well as unable to increase through accepting new members (i.e., conversion), marriage outside the sect is seen to be an irretrievable loss from the original population. The only alteration to this primordial population is one involving the loss of a soul (through outmarriage, subsequent excommunication, and the end of one conduit of reincarnation).

The principle of reincarnation supports the notion that marriage must remain an endogamous institution. The finite number of souls is obliged to keep itself "pure" and viable by marrying and procreating within its bounded community. It is inevitable, of course, that some individuals marry outside of the sect. Usually this means they are effectively excommunicated and must leave their home village. In this way, a soul is said to be "lost" (i.e., excommunicated). "New" members can never be gained, nor are they even sought, since conversion is not accepted by the Druze. The birth of a child is not understood to be the appearance of a "new" Druze soul, but rather is considered to be one among the original population. A member is
considered to be weakening the integrity of the group as a whole if they marry outside the sect. They are effectively excommunicated, and their families are scorned. Schaebler notes that:

While the political system of the Druzes is tribal and fragmented, "the culture of Druzedom", which includes strong notions of solidarity among the brethren of the faith and endogamy, is a unifying force. (Schaebler 1998:335)

Endogamy is one of the key ways this sect, known for its in-fighting as well as its solidarity, remains unified. Reincarnation is seen to be the effective self-perpetuation of the sect, the recycling of a discretely bounded population of souls.

This model is an elaborate and effective way in which to maintain a rule prohibiting outmarriage. It directly presents outmarriage as a serious threat to the integrity of a primordial, discrete number of Druze souls. In this model, the choice of one individual affects the welfare of all, into a near infinite future. Once lost, forever gone. But how does this sort of model reverberate in the everyday life of people? Certainly it alone does not prevent outmarriage. What prevents outmarriage is the threat it is seen to pose to the reputation of an individual and their extended family. One must always look to see the impact of an action on a quotidian level, not just a theoretical
level. The sisters of my friend Rana would have significantly less potential to find a good husband if Rana married outside the sect. A family without the means to live beyond conservative strictures does not have the luxury of manipulation and maneuverability within the given system.

In the case of Druze who are more upwardly mobile and transnational than most of the people I knew in Jebel Druze, outmarriage is not a particularly problematic issue. Yet at the same time some effort is made even among these more privileged groups to encourage marriage within the sect. Every year in the United States and Venezuela, large extended families of Druze living abroad hold annual reunions that function, among other things, as industrious matchmaking events. In addition, even though outmigration to the Gulf States, and South and North America has affected the marriage market to the detriment of marriageable Druze women (they outnumber the marriageable Druze men of their generation who are still in Syria), many Druze men who are working abroad return home to marry and bring a wife back to their country of employment. Several of the weddings I attended in Suwayda were international: between Druze men who had grown up in Venezuela but who eventually became engaged to a "girl from the village" (of comparable class) who grew up in the Suwayda region. Videos taken at these
events were brought back to Venezuela so families with marriageable men could get a good look at all the available potential brides from back home for their sons. Having seen these videos, many single men and their families return to Syria in the summer to attend family weddings but also in order to make intense rounds of visiting in the hopes of arranging a marriage.

A’s brother, R, who lives in the United States, is not yet married. When he was here last summer he did the bride-shopping rounds, without success. R talked about the conflict of men living abroad wanting a wife from back home yet becoming ultimately ambivalent, unable to act, make the plunge. F, for example [another Druze man living abroad who wants to marry someone from back home, but never seems able to follow through with it]. (1996.01.30.)

Sometimes, however, there is some ambivalence for the more transnational single men who have lived abroad for a while when it comes to marrying someone from back home.

Summer in Suwayda is high wedding season, replete with its own wedding economy that supported a small army of bakers, seamstresses, and hair stylists who were incomparably busy and gainfully employed during the summer months. In the summer the population of Suwayda swelled with visitors from near and far. Every evening the Scania busses, full of wedding guests, would blare their deafening horns, announcing their progression across town from one event to another. Some events drew impressive crowds. At
one event I attended, approximately 2500 people crowded into the Suwayda saleh (auditorium) to witness the presentation of a newly married couple. Both bride and groom were from the prominent Syrian Druze Atrash family. The groom, however, lived, worked, and had grown up in Venezuela. The bride was from Syria. A major family such as the Atrash has extensive social obligations, indicated by the fact that they are one of four other families in Suwayda who runs a mudhafa (guest house, reception hall). An endogamous wedding in a prominent family such as this requires a venue larger than a mudhafa for the presentation of the bride and groom. After the event at the saleh, a more select group

44 There are four mudhafat in Suwayda. In addition to the Atrash, the other families who own and run a mudhafa are the families of Abou-Assali, Jarbua, and al-Fadel.
45 A mudhafa is a guesthouse where visitors are received, and occasionally lodged. Mudhafat are common regionally, they are not Druze-specific. Typically they are a structure that exists apart from any private residence and are owned and maintained either by a prominent family or an entire community. They enable families who, by virtue of their size and prominence, have extensive social obligations and must receive large numbers of visitors during holidays, weddings, funerals, etc. Traditionally it is said that a visitor can arrive at a Druze mudhafe and expect to be able to sleep there and be fed for forty days before being expected to explain the purpose of their visit.
46 My first impression of one of these events is excerpted here from my fieldnotes: "The steps to the saleh were flanked by two lines of men who were greeting arrivals, each line was perhaps fifteen to twenty men long. Once 'admitted' by each man, you gain access to the women's receiving line, just inside the door .... we walked further in past the entrance to see the auditorium divided down the middle by sex. It was a sea of tarbouches, moustaches, and men's faces to the right; futas (white, diaphanous veils), bedali (traditional long black tunics), and women's faces to the left. We managed to greet all we were supposed to, including 'arees (groom) and 'aruus (bride), before seating ourselves. To the right, standing in front of the men (the most sheikh-ly part of the crowd) was the groom's retinue, smaller than the bride's. We greeted them and then the bride's group at the other end of the
moved on, in noisy busses and horn-honking cars, to the local hotel's reception room for a more intimate party of two hundred people.

During the summer days in Suwayda, the international visitors, particularly the young unmarried men, were shuttled around from house to house visiting families with eligible young potential brides whom their families had heard about or even seen on videos. Clearly there is still an effort made to arrange marriages endogamously, despite international borders. Of course this is not unique to the Druze. This is typical of many small ethnic groups who have dispersed, for example Estonians in Canada and the US, or Lithuanians in the Greater Southwest US, or wealthy Indian gem dealer families.

Auditorium, standing up on their two-step platform, the visual focus of the event. There were about eight young women on the platform. In the midst of the din and dancing in the center of the floor were mingling pockets of people and all kinds of electrical cables. In attendance throughout the evening were the camera's eyes and their even more obtrusive companions, the heat-emitting floodlights. These cameras gave more of a staged effect to the whole thing for me, the bride's flashing smile for the floodlights, rapidly disappearing when the light's turned off. The couple was visibly tired by the time I left the party later that night at the hotel. The din in the saleh was impressive. After the dancing in the center of the auditorium died down, the groom's retinue started to move toward the bride's platform. After a short while the entire group, both bride and groom retinues together, began to circle around the auditorium (a slow motion "wave" effect), starting with the older men seated closest to the entrance. As they proceeded to move counter clockwise around the auditorium, each part of the audience they passed would stand, many of them waving, nodding as the couple and their retinue made their way gradually around the auditorium. The camera was there by their side, floodlights illuminating and heating up the event. Sheikhs were the first of the audience to leave. It took nearly twenty minutes to reach the outside steps once it was over." (24.08.95)
Local Doctrine

In the course of fieldwork, a range of local theories were offered to explain the existence of the Druze outmarriage prohibition. One of the religious teachers of the sect explained that the prohibition existed "in order to keep the blood pure. For example, cows go with cows, and sheep go with sheep. You don't have cows and sheep coming together, do you?" He went on to say that reincarnation cycles are the vehicle through which this purity is maintained and achieved over time.

A similar explanation was sometimes expressed by marriage-age adults. One young woman in particular tended to be outspoken on the issue. When the subject of marriage came up, she often talked about how important it was to marry someone within one's own sect. The reasons for this included the simple fact that marrying within avoids lots of trouble and pain in peoples' lives, which is true enough in the Syrian Druze context. She would add as well that it is simply "better for like to marry like. There is a good reason for why this law exists, even if we do not know it".

Also I would claim that ideologically, there is more overt acknowledgement of the cultural and class constraints driving the social and economic arrangements that constitute
marriage than there is in our own culture. Although many students at the University of Damascus may "fall in love" with someone, people often made it clear to me that, in the end, love is really secondary, that "love comes after marriage", at least ideally. Outmarriage was referred to as something that is very selfish and causes deep damage to families, sometimes even the death of distraught parents. Take, for example, the following sentiment which I noted in my fieldnotes:

B likes to relate that Y's mom died because Y married a non-Druze. Y's mom had long had leukemia, but that [outmarriage] was the shock that really killed her, according to B. (01.03.96)

Because the Druze sect is secretive when it comes to its esoteric religious knowledge, and most young adults are uninitiated into this knowledge, many of them say they are compelled to accept on faith that there is a logical explanation underlying rules such as the outmarriage prohibition. For some young people, this leap of faith is not problematic. Institutionalized secrecy makes acceptance easier for some. For others, accepting on faith that there is a reason for everything, albeit a reason obscured by secrecy, can be frustrating personally and it also means they are often unable to explain fully to curious non-Druze friends what their sect is all about. Additionally,
complicating the issue is the notion that secrecy should shroud what pieces of religious knowledge young adults do have. To what degree do they feel comfortable talking about what they do know if they are supposed to respect the secrecy of religious knowledge that they might possess?

**Anti-Doctrine**

There are those, however, who do not see the outmarriage prohibition as justified, or that it is better simply for "like to marry like". Those opposed to the prohibition of outmarriage tend to see it as not having arisen out of doctrine, but as something that came about as a result of centuries of occupation. This latter view claims that an insidious form of population control (i.e., selective isolation and the administrative favoritism of minorities) was imposed from outside the community, a strategy that effectively discouraged greater Arab unity by breaking up populations into manageable sectarian units. This worked to augment sectarian divisiveness, thus making intersectarian marriage less likely, because it brought on competition for favoritism from the Ottomans and then the French.

Regarding the current era, the explanation was offered that Syria's head of state, President Hafez al-Asad, "rules
in the name of sectarianism" (bi ism al-ta'ifi). Ba'th Party rhetoric purports a unified Syrian citizenry, unencumbered by internal divisions. However, as some of my informants would claim, Syria is a classic example that it is often easier to rule a divided state than a truly united people. "If the 'Alawi did not exist, Asad would not be the head of state", I was told. It is in the state's interest to have an internally divided populace, each guarding its own sect's claims to political power. The previous occupiers of the region, the Ottomans and French, knew this and used it to their advantage, as Philip Khoury (1987) and others have pointed out. The Ottoman millet system, in which each recognized religious community was granted some degree of autonomy, worked to augment latent sectarian competition and divisiveness. This system was continued by the French and English in their respective Mandatory era.

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47 In Philip Khoury's words, "It is true that by virtue of their language, religion, and customs the bulk of the inhabitants of Syria possessed common bonds and also formed part of a wider unit, the Arab people. However, certain Syrians were differentiated from one another and from their neighbors in their outlook and perhaps also in their interests. For instance, although the majority of Syrians during the Mandate era were Muslims, a significant minority of them were heterodox Muslims, and there were also many Christians. Of the total population of that part of geographical Syria which came under French control after World War I (corresponding to the modern Syrian republic), 69% were Sunni Muslims and 16% were heterodox Muslims (Alawites, Druzes, Isma'ilis). As for the 14 percent of the population who were Christians, some were Catholics or Uniates ... while others belonged to other rites, in particular the Greek Orthodox rite. There were also several thousand Arabized Jews in the large towns. This multiplicity of sects gave rise in Syria to a fierce sectarianism that was exacerbated by the Ottoman system of granting a certain degree of self-government to..."
territories. After independence, and in the self-conscious absence of a millet system in contemporary Syria, one way of perpetuating an internally divided populace has been through the encouragement, albeit indirect, of marriage within tightly bounded, sectarian populations. One indirect way to achieve this is in not providing a civil marriage option, which in effect works to encourage marriage within one's sect. For those with whom I spoke who saw the world in this way, "religion is politics, and politics is religion". Sectarian identity then can be seen to perpetuate deeply ingrained hegemonies of state power. Consequently, one way to look at the fierceness of the resistance to outmarriage in the Druze sect is as something intricately tied up with histories of internal and external power struggles. When it comes to the institution of marriage, the imagined population of Syria (undifferentiated, patriotic, unified) is in fact more tightly controlled by its citizens than it is by the state. People make their institutions, not just some monolithic state. I found in my fieldwork that individual Druze were often strong supporters of ideologies that worked to maintain clear boundaries between themselves and other Syrians. These individuals were as much the guardians and enforcers of sectarian boundaries as any state each recognized religious community or millet and by the intervention of
policy has been (e.g., no civil marriage, or the millet system of the past). Management of the population comes about through tightly controlled means at the sect-level policing of marriage and outmarriage, because the perpetuation of the imagined community requires this.

But not every Druze imagines the same kind of community. There are still those who hold fast to dreams of a pan-Arab unity, and who bemoan the pettiness and punitive parochialism that they see in the perpetuation of a Druze outmarriage prohibition.

Clearly the combined increase in economic outmigration (less marriageable men locally) as well as the increased internal mobility within the country (most notably among college students) has resulted in an increase of intersectarian marriages. As a result, changing economic and political circumstances have fueled debates about ideologies that support certain views of imagined populations.

Marriage and Group Solidarity

One must consider comparative ideologies of the family to appreciate the importance of marriage in different contexts. For the Druze, as for other Syrians and Arabs
generally, it is safe to say that in general marriage is considered a fundamental duty, that it is something that is important for and reflects on a family, as well as a legal arrangement. Moreover, in Islam marriage in considered a religious duty. Speaking very broadly of course, the notion that marriage is a duty or an explicit union of families, is unlikely to resonate for the average U.S. citizen, steeped as U.S. liberal ideology is in notions about the pursuit of individual happiness.

Naomi Quinn's (1987) discourse analysis of cultural models of marriage underscores the point that, at least among her small group of interviewees (who were white, middle-class native born Americans who spoke English as a first language), marriage is seen as a bond between two individuals, not between two families. In all the discourse that Quinn excerpts, an American model of marriage seems exclusively focused on two people.

An initial, and admittedly superficial, contrast that can be made cross-culturally is that for Quinn's Americans, marriage is a union of two individuals and marriage is an individual's choice, but in Syria marriage is a union of two families and marriage is a familial and religious duty. This is not to say that the family does not exist in the American model Quinn describes, but it is certainly in the
background. In the American model, the shadowy presence of possibly disgruntled families who perceive that a better match could have been made exists. In short, extended families and religious expectations tend not to dominate the equation in American models, whereas they do in Syrian models.

In a booklet that presents the sect's tenets and history to an English-speaking emigre community, the American Druze Society's Committee on Religious Affairs makes the following point regarding the sect's approach to marriage:

In the Muwahiddun's jurisprudence, the marriage is not simply physical pleasure dictated by desire and love. It is a fundamental law of the universe mandated by God for the survival of mankind. It is legal only if it is consummated within the law. [Taquiddin 1979:425 in CORA 1996:24]

There are clearly two models being contrasted here, that of a purported decadent love marriage (selfish, ill-considered, sexually-motivated), as opposed to a legally sanctioned marriage of duty. The tension between these models is felt not just among emigrant Druze, to whom the above quote is

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48 Muwahiddun is the more formal religious name the Druze have for themselves. It alludes more precisely to the fact that they consider themselves "Unitarians" or "Unists" (Shavit's term), since Muwahiddun is derived from the triliteral root, wahed, which can be translated "one" or "unity". The appellation, Druze, on the other hand, most likely derives from one of the early prophets of the sect, al-Darazi. Although most commonly they, and others, refer to themselves as Druze, it is a more casual referent. Muwahiddun is more formal and directly linked to the sect's theosophical principles.
directed, but also among their relatives in Syria today. Is this tension a new problem, or has it endured for generations/centuries?

This clash of models is not a "new" problem brought on by Western corruption of morality, as some might claim. At the same time there are new elements in the equation. There is a long tradition in Arab love poetry, both oral and written, attesting to forbidden love between non-marriageable individuals. Abu-Lughod (1986; 1993) discusses at length the frustrations of young Awlad 'Ali bedouin girls who cannot marry the boy they truly love. Duty compels them to marry the suitable choice, determined by the families concerned. Romantic love is by no means a prerogative of the West only.

Also, the stereotypical notion of a singularly complacent and passive Arab bride/wife grossly overshadows real life struggles women have reconciling issues of natal, affinal, and personal loyalties. In the Muslim Middle East, native social scientists and feminists bemoan Western feminists' tendency to assume certain cultural patterns are only indicative of Islamic oppression of women. To take a gross level example, sexual segregation, the tendency in the West is to present the harem something that men have instituted in order to confine and control women, so they
may have exclusive sexual access to multiple wives. This notion titillated Western colonials since their first arrival, and has pervaded the exoticizing Western gaze ever since (e.g., Alloula 1986). Ahmed (1992) points out that Islamic women do not themselves necessarily see segregation as oppressive in itself. She suggests that it is women who forbid males to enter exclusively female spaces, noting that the word harem is derived from *haram* which translates variously as "forbidden", "sacred", and "inviolable". In exclusively female spaces, women gather to visit, gossip, suggest marriage alliances, criticize and ridicule men. Ahmed (1992) and others (e.g., Mernissi, Mohanty) have pointed out Western feminists' tendency to perpetuate the idea that Muslim women, and Third World women in general, are passive and ignorant, even inferior. This assumption reveals more in terms of the lacunae of some Western feminist scholarship, and corresponding attitudes about moral superiority, than it does about women in the Third World. Ahmed adds that the way in which the Arab and Muslim "oppression" of women is presented in Western media and scholarship works to justify, even insidiously to promote, hostility toward Arabs and Muslims (1992:246).

Nonetheless, it is no coincidence that this point about conflicting marriage models is mentioned in American Druze
Society publications. This organization considers itself "the vehicle in this [i.e., American] society to achieve [the] purpose" of preserving the "cultural heritage, history, and universal teachings of Tawhid [i.e., Druze doctrine] for their descendants" (CORA 1996:iv). The contrast between these models of marriage speaks to contemporary clashes between the expectations of generations both at home and abroad.

Taqiuddin describes marriage as a duty necessary for the survival of the Druze sect. In a small sect that prohibits outmarriage, marrying endogamously is seen as crucial for the survival of the Druze. Certainly the wheels that drive boundary-making between any conglomeration of ethnic groups, perceived races, religious groups, etc., use the prohibition against outmarriage as a way to maintain clear boundaries. The prohibition against marrying out of the Druze sect is not particularly noteworthy from a universal standpoint. All groups tend to discourage "marrying out" to some degree or another. I claim, however, that the prohibition in the Druze case is experienced as particularly forceful for a number of reasons, including the fact that the sect neither seeks nor accepts converts. Most Muslims, for example, have more room to maneuver around the issue of mixed religious marriages because of the option
they have for the non-Muslim spouse to convert. Also, Muslim men may marry women who are "people of the book", i.e., Biblical monotheists, Jews and Christians. A Druze who marries a non-Druze never has the ability to have their union sanctioned under the sect's family law, at the Druze court, Mahkami al-Methhebiyya, although they can register their marriage in the appropriate religious court (i.e., Shari'a or Christian court) and at the Ministry of the Interior. But despite being legally married, when it comes to their home village or town they usually feel compelled to put physical distance between themselves and the Druze portion of their extended families. They move away from the Jebel to the relative anonymity of Damascus, or other cities and large towns. But Syria is not a large country, there are not many spaces that allow people to disappear. Foucault's Panopticon is not an inappropriate model for life in Syria. Both the state and one's community are watching. The tentacles of gossip and in-group surveillance reach far. News on renegade couples is available from many sources. And leaving the country is an option for only a privileged few. But even then, the porousness and pervasiveness of gossip across boundaries and time zones is remarkable⁴⁹.

⁴⁹One friend, L, was engaged to a Druze man in Los Angeles. He would hear gossip about L's behavior back home in Suwayda and Damascus, and
Thus, I freely admit that the prohibition against outmarriage is nearly universal due to humankind's irrepresible urge to make distinctions between us and them, members and nonmembers. At the same time, focusing on the repercussions of the prohibition in the case of the Druze elucidates both universal and particular aspects of marriage politics. And as an anthropologist, it offers a way to see a group negotiating internally regarding issues of group identity.

**Druze Family Law**

Many Druze claim that their religion and family law is more egalitarian regarding gender relations, and in granting more legal rights and autonomy to Druze women than is the case for the Islamic Shari'a (Abu-Izzedin 1993, Alamuddin and Starr 1980, Makarem 1974). This chapter also describes what it is that is considered egalitarian about Druze doctrine and family law, and then looks at how these claims to egalitarianism play out in Druze women's lives. Some requisite attention is given to outlining the provisions of Druze family law that set it apart from that of the Islamic

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they would have bitter fights about these rumors maligning L's virtue when they would talk on the phone.
shari’a whose family law predominates in the regions in which most Druze live.

But, taking an anthropological perspective, the discussion goes beyond what the letter of the law indicates, to consider what the lived experience of various laws and behavioral expectations has been in some particular cases. In a general way I am asking what differences may exist between the theory of certain legal/religious principles and the their practice in everyday life, both in the case of marriage and, in a previous chapter, reincarnation (Chapter Four).

Druze practice their own family law, one which differs in some but not all regards from Muslim Shari’a law. Below is a list of the most salient differences between the Druze and Shari’a laws, followed by fuller explanations.

Table 5.1: Some differences between Druze and Shari’a Family Law

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Druze Family Law</th>
<th>Shari’a Family Law</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>age requirements</td>
<td>engagement, 15-17 marriage, minimum 18 for males</td>
<td>less restrictions regarding age of engagement and marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>marriage, minimum 18 for females</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of wives</td>
<td>monogamous marriage only</td>
<td>polygamy permitted, up to four wives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary marriage (mu’ta)</td>
<td>ban on mu’ta</td>
<td>mu’ta permitted (Shi’a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorce</td>
<td>difficult to arrange, more binding,</td>
<td>easier to arrange, less binding,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>divorced couple may not remarry; associated prohibitions</td>
<td>remarriage permitted inheritance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Inheritance</strong></td>
<td>more freedom to dispense of property as an individual wishes</td>
<td>more routinized legal limitations for dispensing property as per Shari'a law</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Age of Engagement and Marriage**

Druze law fixes a formal age of maturity at fifteen, being the minimum age of engagement (associated with sexual maturity/puberty). A religious legal age of maturity, the age of competence for marriage, is reached later at seventeen for females, eighteen for males. Religious law, however, prefers that a man has reached age twenty before marriage, so that he may be more established in the world and able to support a family. Although marriage is more typically arranged between families rather than individuals, the logic in having age requirements is meant to allow a girl who is considered mature the chance to consent to or refuse an arranged marriage. This is considered to be one of the signs of Druze respect for women and women's autonomy, that she has a voice of consent or refusal to marriage arrangements made for her. Among Muslims, there are less restrictions and enforcement of age requirements, and less attention given to consent of the prospective bride.
(of course there is variation). Although in some contexts there may be age restrictions, if an arranged marriage is made for a girl at age nine or at age seventeen, she usually has little choice in the matter.

Consistent with practices across religious divisions, it is considered best if a bride is between one year and fifteen years younger than the groom, that she is twenty years or younger when she is engaged, and younger than twenty-two when she marries. The preference for a ten to fifteen year difference between an older husband and younger wife seems prevalent in Syria among Druze, Muslims, and Christians. This is largely due to practical considerations and the economic burden put on the man to provide appropriate bridewealth and to have a house for the couple to move into. Amira and other Druze and non-Druze acquaintances have made occasional reference to the ideal balance in age between a man and a woman: the "right woman" for a thirty-five-year-old man is between twenty to twenty-five years old. This is made as a normative statement, without reference to how economics may drive the trend. When asked whether the preferred age difference has more to do with economics than inherent compatibility, people disagree and describe the ideal male/female age split in a
normative way, the older man does best with a younger woman and vice versa.

**Marriage**

One of the main sources of difference between the practice of Islam and that of the Druze religion involves marriage laws. The Druze strictly prohibit both polygamy and *mu‘ta* (temporary marriage). Although it is true that the legitimacy of both polygamy and *mu‘ta* are debated in religious circles, they are nonetheless permitted and practiced under many interpretations of the Shari‘a. The Druze are thus strictly monogamous, and have been, at least in theory, since their inception. However, it is also said that historically the transition from the practice of polygamy to monogamy was far from immediate, and in fact sometimes had to be enforced. In this century, at any rate, polygamy among the Druze is extremely rare. Druze praise this aspect of their family law because, in the words of ‘Afifa Sa‘b, a Lebanese fighter for the liberation of women,

... her husband cannot infringe her exclusive status by dividing his affections among several wives; that she no longer feels herself to be a concubine or an object of commercial dealings; that she has acquired self-confidence and devotes her energies to her husband, her children, and her home; and that the husband, for his part, has learnt to accept and adapt himself to the monogamous form of marriage. (in Layish 1982:100)
In most ways, monogamy is seen as an improvement in the quality of life for women. They no longer have to worry about the threat of their husband marrying a second wife.\textsuperscript{50} The major problem encountered, however, by the monogamous Druze revolves around the course of action that almost inevitably must take place if a couple fails to have children. A couple in this situation, no matter how happy they may be in their marriage, usually feels forced to divorce so that the man may remarry and have the chance to have children with another wife. The burden of fertility is thus seen as the woman's responsibility. Adoption is not an option.

The selection of marriage partners is quite similar between the Druze and Muslim communities. It is preferable to marry a relative, and the FBD pattern (father's brother's daughter) is considered ideal. Clan endogamy and marriage within a village is preferred.\textsuperscript{51} Because of this tendency, it is more typical than not that a bride and groom have

\textsuperscript{50}Although in practice polygamy is not the norm, it is permitted in Islam, and can be a cause for worry for women who do not want co-wives.

\textsuperscript{51}Strick reports the following information from a Druze village she worked in, in northern Israel, which had particularly large clans, making endogamy and patrilateral parallel cousin marriage more realizable: "In the present adult generation, with 109 total marriages, 34.86% of the marriages are clan endogamous. Further, 26.3% of the endogamous marriages, and 9.1% of the total marriages, are to a father's brother's daughter. There is also a fairly high proportion of mother's brother's daughter marriage, 10.09% .... When other first
generally known each other since childhood (as is the case with Amira and Jaad, discussed shortly). Also consistent across the region is the great deal of importance placed on a bride's virginity and reputation for sexual modesty\textsuperscript{52}. There is also a preference for sons pan-regionally.

Several Druze women who befriended me commented, in the course of discussing the problems rife with outmarriage, that the Syrian Druze community will accept a mixed couple once children come along, but that is assuming it is a Druze man who married out. A Druze woman who marries a non-Druze may or may not be accepted back into the community even after she starts having children.

It is interesting to note that Layish (1982:108-109) understands inter-religious marriages, especially between Druze men and non-Druze women, to be fairly widespread. His basis of reference is court records in Israel and Lebanon.

cousin marriages are included, the first cousin marriages constitute 24.77\% of the marriages\textsuperscript{.} (Strick 1990:103)

\textsuperscript{52} As in many Muslim, as well as Christian, Arab societies, the honor of a patrilineage is intimately linked to the sexual purity of its female members. It is thus extremely important for women to maintain the reputation of being sexually modest, and it is expected that a woman remains a virgin until consummation on the marriage night. Establishing proof of a woman's virginity is common (though not universal) on a wedding's consummation night, through the presentation of a bloodied bedsheets. This is part of what legitimates the marriage. The moral imperatives that are involved in maintaining women's honor preclude any kind of acknowledgement that premarital sex might occur among unmarried partners. But premarital sex does occur. As a result, there is a market in the "re-virginization" of women. In Syria, for the fee of approximately $600 (roughly a half-year's worth of the average government salary), a suture can be sewn by a physician so that a woman bleeds upon penetration on her wedding night.
He relates that there is an expansion of this phenomenon as Druze men increasingly work outside of the village in armies, urban centers, and foreign countries. He adds that some Druze are alarmed by this trend and claim that this "deviation" is assuming epidemic proportions among both Druze men and Druze women. In my view, what Layish described for Israel and Lebanon is consistent with the situation in Syria, and for the same reasons — because of the movement of young people within and outside of the country, men mostly but women as well. The Syrian Druze community is reputed to be more conservative than the Lebanese or Israeli. Also the Syrian Druze have been able to maintain their relative physical isolation more effectively than in the other two countries which are also considered to be more "modernized" than Syria. But these purported disincentives to outmarriage -- conservatism, physical isolation, and relative "modernization" of the nation state -- do not themselves create an iron wall that prevents marriage outside the sect. This is because the context is changing, each generation is witnessing more movement, mostly economically driven. Geographic movement begets change and challenges to established ways of organizing society as the ideological borders between groups are being considered and negotiated.
Divorce

The peculiarity of Druze divorce law lay not so much in how a marriage is dissolved, which does not differ greatly from Muslim shari‘a procedure, but rather in its effects. An absolute repudiation exists once a divorce is enacted. No remarriage is possible for the Druze couple as it is for Muslims. Another factor setting apart Druze divorce law is the fact that, unlike Islamic law in which the wife has no right of unilateral divorce (talaq), under Druze law either spouse may divorce the other so long as the rules of appropriate compensation are adhered to (depending on who is at fault—there are also provisions for cases of no fault). Besides the fact that a marriage between Druzes can never be reinstated after divorce takes place, there are also strict prohibitions regarding the physical proximity of a former couple; they cannot see each other or even be in the same building.

Different writers claim that divorce is not nearly as easy a matter for a Druze to accomplish in comparison to the comparative ease with which Muslims can arrange and execute a divorce. Again, Druze women may initiate divorce proceedings, something the letter of the law theoretically allows Muslim women, but in practice is rarely carried out.
Abu-Izzedin points out, however, that divorce is definitely the husband's privilege in most cases (1993:230). Moreover, "the inhibitions of kinship and other social considerations (e.g., reputation and gossip) have exercised restraint upon its use. Marriages are, as a rule, successful and lasting" (ibid).

There are several causes for divorce. The most frequent one among the Druze involves barrenness, and is usually accepted by both the man and the woman as grounds for divorce. Where Druze have only one solution for barrenness, divorce, Muslims have two, divorce or polygamy. Other causes of divorce, sometimes with the wife's consent, include a woman's being past the childbearing age, elderly, chronically ill or unable to fulfill her wifely duties due to some infirmity, the husband wishing, in these cases, to take a young wife instead. Layish adds, "he may ... have become rich and wish to acquire symbols of a higher social status corresponding to his new economic position" (Layish 1982:100). It is in this kind of situation where some commentators wonder whether the ban on polygamy can work against the Druze women. Where a man might in a polygamous society might have the choice in certain circumstances to marry another wife, a Druze can only opt to divorce and remarry. Layish reports known cases of Druze men converting
(i.e., getting married according to Shari’a law which technically gives him a Sunni Muslim status) so that they can remain married to their first wife who is Druze and still take a second spouse (some similar instances have also been reported for Christian families). But if a man chooses this route without a wife’s approval, she can initiate divorce proceedings.

The consequences of divorce are usually severe for the Druze woman. Although she is due financial compensation from her husband, this is only a one-time division of the property, and this does not necessarily ensure her future support, as a polygamous marriage would. Also, if there are children involved, once they are past a certain age, custody irrevocably reverts to the father. Several Druze I spoke with were startled to hear that in the case of American divorce, more often than not children live with the mother.

Some Contemporary Stories

Amira

From my very first encounter with Amira, she was bent upon assuring me that she was a very modern Druze woman. At the time when I knew her, she was in her early twenties and unmarried (considered a bint/“girl”, until she is married). She was well-educated and out-going, and considered herself
relatively unconstrained by the conservative mores of her society. Yet at the same time she was actively concerned with preserving the status quo and certain conservative values in Druze society. She was a from a relatively well-to-do family. Her father was a tolerant man who allowed his children the freedom to choose their own paths, in education and self-expression. She was permitted to dress and style her hair in non-conventional ways in high school and college, her brother was allowed to pursue an impractical course of study of his choosing, philosophy, when he entered college. Also, Amira was allowed to have "boyfriends" and boys who were friends during her teens and early twenties. Simply having male friends was significant grist for the gossip mill, and she suffered from the freedom of movement she enjoyed. She also spent time with potential suitors who "weren't rich enough" to marry her, and sometimes whom her parents disapproved of, but her father never told her to not spend time with a particular individual. He trusted in her good sense and wanted her to make her own decisions. He might add the suggestive phrase now and then such as, "men and women can never be just friends, you know, my daughter."

Amira was prone to lecture people on the necessity of marrying within one's sect. As soon as the subject of
marriage came up, this was one of the first points she made. She correctly said that it simply avoids much trouble and pain in people's lives, which is true. But moreover, she added, it is simply "better" for like to marry like, there was a good reason for why this law exists, even if we do not know it. Most Druze, as previously mentioned, do not have access to the esoteric teachings of their religion. It is thus easy to say "there is a reason" for a certain Druze tenet when the uninitiated majority does not have access to the esoteric explanatory texts.

During the period of my fieldwork, Amira and her father were actively engaged in trying to convince a young Druze man, a close friend of Amira's fiancé in America, to divorce his Muslim wife with whom he fell in love in college. This young man, Adham, was banished from his family upon the news that he planned to marry a Muslim girl. He was not allowed in Suwayda and had no contact with his family. Adham's wife's family offered him a job in the Gulf, a chance for him and his wife to build a life of their own, but he declined, finding being so far away from Syria to be too depressing to face. The pressure from his family, his acute homesickness, and the campaign by Amira and her father, were working to pry him out of his marriage. As a shaykh, Amira's father was a traditional peacemaker in the
Druze community, and he negotiated with Adham’s family regarding what would be acceptable, that is, when and how they would accept Adham back into the family. Amira admitted that Adham’s mother was distraught over the whole situation, not having seen her son in nearly two years, but that she would not give in until Adham divorced his Muslim wife. Amira, almost in a whisper, admitted to me that her own fiancé’s brother, Nasib, was once divorced (from a Druze woman). But he had since been happily remarried to a Druze woman. It is much easier for a Druze man to regain reputation and have a second chance at marriage than it is for a Druze woman.

Amira believed in what she called the modern idea of a "love marriage," but only if it is within one’s own sect. When she went to the United States in 1993, she had no intention of seeing her now-intended, Jaad. Jaad’s mother was very eager about the prospect of Amira’s going to the U.S., and essentially obliged Amira to visit Jaad and his married brother, Nasib, while she was in Los Angeles (the obligations inherent regarding visiting are not taken lightly, and her fulfillment, or lack thereof, of visiting obligations reflected on her entire family, not just her). Amira and Jaad were from the same social class, and their families have been close for generations. At the time Amira
was not very fond of Jaad, and really did not want to visit him. Nevertheless she honored Jaad’s mother’s request that she pay a visit. Somehow in the span of two months, five weeks of it spent on the road as a representative of Syria, she and Jaad managed to get re-acquainted, fall in love, decide to marry, have a terrible fight and break up for several days, and get back together again with plans to marry. She would not be engaged if she did not feel she were in love with Jaad, nor would her father pressure her to accept a particular suitor, of which she has had many.

Consistent with the preference for sons pan-regionally, Amira stated that if she and Jaad stayed in the U.S., she would prefer to have two children, both of them sons. If they returned to Syria, then she would like four children. Amira considered her preference for a small family as one of her modern characteristics. She herself comes from what is considered a small family, with four children.

**Rana**

Rana worked at the University of Damascus, and was a graduate student there. She was Druze, in her early thirties, and for several years had been involved with a young professor at the university who was Sunni. Periodically they talked about getting married, but
whenever Rana approached her family, the idea was soundly rejected. Both of her parents were deceased, and the sources of authority in her family rested with her brother and brothers-in-law.

Rana's had been a difficult life. Both her parents died by the time she was 18 (she is now 31). As the oldest, unmarried girl, she has had to essentially be the "mother" ever since the death of her parents. She was not born into wealth and comfort and was a bit more hardened by life than Amira. In many ways, Rana's was a long tale of woe, this being the most recent major problem. Rana worried for her two younger unmarried sisters. Rana's family was neither wealthy nor particularly well-connected in the Druze community. If Rana married Ali, the marriage prospects for her younger sisters would decline because of the scorn brought upon Rana's family for her marrying outside of the sect. It was a troubling choice for Rana. She saw the potential for individual happiness in a marriage to Ali, but still felt a need to protect her sisters and her family from punishing social stigma. Some Americans, mostly embassy personnel, who know Rana through her occasional work tutoring foreigners in Arabic, had encouraged her to focus on her individual happiness, to move out of the family apartment where she and her unmarried siblings lived, and to
marry Ali. These American acquaintances did not understand or appreciate the reverberations her family would experience should she marry out. Rana’s marriage to Ali would have been considered illegitimate on both religious and familial levels. As Armbrust puts it in describing ideal models of marriage as they are presented and transgressed in Egyptian cinema,

In a patriarchal society, any relationship not arranged and approved by the father is illicit, although patriarchal authority may, in life as well as in art, be exercised more by mothers (in the name of the father). The overriding principle is that a legitimate marriage brings together families first and unites individuals only as a secondary consideration. In contrast to an individualized society where love is a prelude to marriage, in a patriarchal society love follows marriage. Of course real marriages ... do not necessarily conform to such idealized models.”

(Armbrust 1998:29)

I would suggest that there exists the ideology in the 1990s US that marriage is about individual choice, two individuals choosing to marry each other out of mutual love and respect apart from other constraints. This ideology completely masks, among other things, the positioning of class in a society that is known for its blithe denial of class. This ideology of individual choice that Rana’s American acquaintances tried to persuade her with implies that many Americans think they themselves are not constrained by something like “culture” in their social relations, that
only exotic others seem to face cultural constraints in their life choices. Rana told me that the previous foreigners she had tutored told her, "Rana, your siblings are all adults now, it is time for you to allow yourself to be happy and to stop thinking about everyone else all the time." I have to admit that I too expressed a similarly shallow understanding of Rana’s situation in my fieldnotes early on:

Why doesn’t Rana consider her happiness, a marriage to ‘Ali, a man who loves her and who she loves? No, la abadan [never], mamnua [forbidden] because he’s Sunni, she’s Druze. Also she fears for her sisters if she left. If she married ‘Ali (1) she’d be excommunicated from her extended family and Druze society (2) it’d reflect on her natal family, perhaps renewing, increasing physical violence between brothers and sisters? Is there no appeal ... I perhaps naively thought Rana was apart enough from Druze society to be able to marry for love. Despite her frequent references to, and criticisms of the closed, bound nature of society, she is not free to break loose from it in the practice of her own life. Despite her not being much concerned with Druze rules, still bound in by the mores (Druze or pan-Levant Arab). [14.02.95]

What I perceived as her being “apart enough from Druze society” meant to me, at the time, her ability to look objectively at her society. I soon realized that by no means did that necessarily imply an ability or desire to extricate herself from it. I realized not too long after this entry my limited understanding of the whole picture for thinking she could just break away and go take care of her
own happiness. It just was not that simple. A few weeks later, she had a "sister's summit" of sorts where the possibility of her marrying 'Ali was discussed. She came away from several days worth of heated, emotional discussion with ...

a resounding NO .... Nejwa's [Nejwa is one of Rana's sisters] husband, Nadeem, said he would divorce Nejwa if Rana marries 'Ali (marries "out"). Nejwa says to Rana, "Rana, you do what you want, I won't tell you what to do, I want you to be happy." Nejwa has two sons .... Nadeem posed this threat because of the gossip that will ensue, the maligning of family name, and all those associated with family by marriage. Rana says "everyone is always talking." People will say bad things about her deceased parents, they weren't good people (because if they were their children wouldn't be doing such awful things" etc.). Rana's act would have far-reaching reverberations, to her parents' graves, in-laws, and so on keza keza [etcetera etcetera]. Herein lies a liability of the extended family, collective punishment .... Much is at stake in her choice, and it looks less and less possible that she will lean toward marrying 'Ali." [fieldnotes 3/6/95]

Strick mentions in her discussion of marriage in a Druze community in Israel that the husband was commonly viewed as the final authority in most family matters. Even though there are discussions and compromises between a husband and wife, the husband essentially has the last word. What is difficult to ascertain involves the mixture of authority, compromise, and power-wrangling that goes on between a husband and a wife. Part of the basis for a husband's authority, Strick maintains, is the threat of divorce. It
is much easier for husbands than for wives to obtain a divorce, and once divorced, is quite hard for a woman to support herself or remarry, or to fend off the bad reputation she will likely inherit (Strick 1990:110). Often when the issue of Rana’s possible marriage did come up, Rana’s eldest brother physically threatened her. Her brother-in-law threatened to divorce her sister if Rana followed through on marrying ‘Ali. Her relatives were clearly not using doctrinal arguments to try persuading Rana against outmarriage. The pressure was threatening and sometimes even violent and physical, and was applied purely in order to protect the extended family from losing social capital by controlling the bounds within which Rana chose to marry, not to keep “pure” a primordial population of Druze souls.

When working on Rana’s family tree, I noticed that two men had married out. Both men had emigrated, one married an American, the other a Mexican. I asked Rana if this had caused problems for the family in Syria, assuming that it had based on what I had been hearing from both Amira and Rana. “Oh no!,” she replied. On the contrary, marrying abroad to a foreigner seems to bestow a certain status on a family. For one thing, the parents can now travel abroad and come home to tell stories about being in America. Plus,
Rana said, it was less of a problem when a man married out than it was when a woman married out. Moreover, women were not the ones who were emigrating abroad to work. Rana thought the story previously mentioned here of Adham, the Druze who married a Muslim girl for love, indicated that he did not really love her. If he did, she said, he would have stuck with her and would have taken the job that her family offered him in the Gulf. Also, she predicted, the family would stop giving him the cold shoulder once they started having children.

In mid-March, 1995, I visited the village in Jebel Druze where Nejwa and Nadeem live. Nadeem was asking me about my family, how many siblings I had, where my parents lived, and so on. When I admitted that my mother had been divorced and re-married when I was young (people are extremely inquisitive about familial history and money matters), Nadeem commented on how different our two societies were. When my mother divorced, her children stayed with her. But in his society, he said, if a couple divorces, the children stay with the father. (Usually children stay with the mother until they reach the ages of ten and twelve, after which point they remain with the father’s family, their patriliny.) Nadeem was not merely having an idle conversation. He was emphasizing to the
others in the room the repercussions of his threat to
divorce his wife should her sister Rana marry her Sunni

The Gender Equity Debate

Layish claims that “the legal position of Druze women
is incomparably better than that of Muslim women. However,
their social position, at any rate in matters of personal
status, is inferior to that of the latter and thus lags far
behind the legal position” (1982:371), adding naively that
this gap between law and practice will narrow as the
generalized liberation of women proceeds, and as the Druze
continue to move toward nuclear families over extended ones.
It seems to be the case that the closer to Western models a
group is in terms of its family law (monogamy, both parties
able to initiate divorce, women’s ability to own property)
the more “progressive” a group is perceived to be. But, and
this is a central point, rules and actions (theory and
practice) are often two quite separate beasts. And just as
importantly here is the problematic and narrow way Western
commentators perceive the “liberation of women” with the
move toward the nuclear family to be the panacea for Arab or
other Third World Women’s woes, when in fact it can
perpetuate alienation, depression, and disempowerment.
Layish claims that improvements, if only theoretical, for Druze women were accomplished by a progressive departure from the shari‘a. Because his work drew almost entirely on information contained in legal records and in discussions with judges and other members of the legal system, he did not have a sense of what might constitute a Druze woman's sense of pride, shame, fairness, or otherwise as she goes about her daily life. Also, there is an insidious Druze/Muslim opposition being created by the structure of this argument, where implicitly the Druze become the forces of modernity, the Muslim the guardians of conservatism.

One of the various ways that Druze differentiate themselves from Islam is by stressing that women are treated with complete equality by the Druze religion. Although Druze intellectuals in each historical era have stressed this point, Andary points out that very few women have been able to attain important positions in the Druze religious-political hierarchy: "few women in reality attain the education and training necessary to become a sheikha (feminine for sheikh). Although the Druze religion allows a certain level of equality, the influence of Middle East patriarchy is too vast and ingrained in Druze society for more than the exceptional woman to attain a high religious position" (1994:10). Those who have reached such notable
positions almost certainly come from well-placed families such as the Atrash, Arslan, or Junblatt (e.g. Abu-Izzedin 1993:231-232). Betts reports, however, that the Druze place high regard on the educational pursuits of both men and women, in part because of the demands of religious initiation. They have, he said, "consistently outpaced all non-Christian Arab groups" (Betts 1988:51) in literacy rates, for example\(^{53}\).

Although theoretically Druze women are permitted to attain the rank of a sheikha, attaining shaykh-ly positions is not necessarily a good barometer of the state of gender relations in a society. It is not easy to measure respect or women’s self-regard in any society or within a single family, for that matter. Moreover Strick warns that “though there is little notion of equality between husband and wife (‘the equality of women’ is viewed as a Western folly), a couple should treat each other with respect” (Strick 1990:111). Many Arab women writers bemoan the way Western feminists have historically misunderstood and misrepresented Arab women through an ethnocentric filter of Western values,

\(^{53}\)Based on 1961 Israeli census figures, Betts reports that 49.6 percent of the Druze community were literate, compared to 37.9 percent in the Muslim community, and 76.1 in the Christian community. The rate for Druze women was half that of Druze men (26.8 percent as opposed to 72.9 percent), but was still twice that of Muslim women (14.4 percent). Close to half of the Druze women under thirty years of age were literate (40.5 percent). In Israel, at any rate, there is a definite trend
usually missing the point completely when it comes to a woman's sources of pride, meaning, power, and status in Middle Eastern society.

Before I embarked upon my fieldwork, I read much about the Druze and their egalitarian leanings in terms of gender relations. Tucked away in the confines of graduate school, preparing myself as much as one can through the text and library research, I admired from afar these frequently touted aspects of Druze doctrine and religious law. But in the process of doing fieldwork and writing a dissertation, I saw I was guilty of having had a blind belief in the text and in "the law," having lost track of the important anthropological point that things always look different "on the ground."

What then is the nature of the lived experience of family law and religious doctrines for women in terms of the purported inherent equality between the sexes? No matter what precepts are idealized in a society ("democracy," "free speech," "socialism"), ordinary people's experience of them is much different than might be implied in jubilant, self-congratulatory manifestos and theoretical tracts. The Druze, as in countless other societies, are guilty of applying double standards to women and men, despite an
official rhetoric denying this. The Druze themselves as well as scholars of the Druze are sometimes guilty of making a bad guy/good guy distinction between themselves and their Muslim neighbors when it comes to discussions of family law. Much is made of the Druze's monogamy, but regardless of whether they practice monogamy or polygamy, if a man wants a trophy wife because he has become rich since he married his first wife and she is now old and sick, he can divorce and remarry. In other words, the spirit of the law matters, but only to a degree. What makes the most difference in the extent to which gender relations are egalitarian is how people live and treat one another within whatever structure exists in their society.

The Issue of Civil Marriage: Lebanon, Turkey, Tunisia

Across most of the Muslim Middle East and North Africa, the institution of marriage is primarily a religious, and not a civil, matter. Thus in order to get married in most of these countries, whether they are Arab or Turkish countries, one must do so through religious channels. There are, however, some countries where civil marriage is an option or even a requirement (Turkey). In Lebanon there is currently a debate ongoing about whether to

the 1972 and 1983 censuses indicate. (Betts 1988:51)
permit the passage of an optional civil marriage code. The debate is lively and often embittered, as the excerpts below indicate.

Jamal Ftouni of the Women’s League .... [said that] such a law could be the key to saving the country from sectarian conflict. (2/27/98, The Daily Star, Beirut)

Sheikh Mohammed Mehdi Shamseddine [president of the Higher Shi‘ite Council] [said] “the notion that civil marriage is needed to promote national accord is unsubstantiated because the proposal of the bill has triggered national strife.” (3/26/98, ibid)

In Bkirki, Zghorta MP Nayla Mouawad said the civil marriage bill “is putting the country in jeopardy.” (3/26/98, ibid)

Acting Druze spiritual leader Bahjat Ghaith called on the government to “drop all controversial issues, including civil marriage, and to resort to calm discussion and dialogue.” (3/26/98, ibid)

The Syrian official ... recommended that the civil marriage issue be put on hold to spare the country internal unrest amid uncertainty over the situation in the south. (3/28/98, ibid)

The proposed optional civil marriage code in Lebanon has stirred up considerable debate and controversy ever since President Hrawi proposed its passage in an end-of-the year address in December, 1997. In Lebanon, pending the passage of this provision, marriage is legitimized exclusively through religious channels. Nevertheless, if Syrians or Lebanese from different religions or sects wish to marry, they have some options. For example, one of them may convert to the other’s religion. Or, a Druze individual
marrying a Sunni Muslim may request a Sunni shaykh marry them by presiding over their contract-signing, which would mean that marriage would be registered ultimately in a shari‘a court. For some Druze in this situation, presenting oneself in this way at shari‘a court does not present a problem of conscience because most Druze in fact see themselves as Muslims, believing all Muslims are one, and that in this context they are not making an insincere claim of affiliation. This "flexibility" may be viewed by outsiders as mere dissimulation and Druze pretending to be what they are not, and mistakenly attributable to Druze taqiyya ("permissible dissimulation"). It certainly is not a straightforward issue because even though most Druze consider themselves Muslim, from a Druze religious court perspective, marrying a Sunni still violates the sect’s prohibition against outmarriage and is thus not considered a legitimate union from the Druze theological perspective.

The Lebanese government recognizes eighteen religious sects. Each sect has its own courts, presided over by clerics who have absolute power over their faithful in civil matters related to marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Therefore, Lebanese of different sects get married and divorced according to different rules. Thus for the most part, Lebanese couples who wish to marry have no choice but
to go through a religious ceremony. For those who can afford it, however, there is an option. Interfaith couples who do not wish to convert, and who can afford the trip, travel outside the country, usually to Cyprus, in order to get married in a civil marriage ceremony. When these couples return, the Lebanese state recognizes their marriage. But, the peculiar and interesting twist is that the marriage is subject to the laws of the country in which the wedding took place, which has been the arrangement since Lebanon gained its independence from the French. Thus, should divorce be sought, the rules of the country where the couple were married are the rules applied in divorce proceedings. For example, in a divorce case between a Lebanese man and an American woman, a property settlement was calculated according to the state law of Arizona in a settlement handed down by a Lebanese court (1/19/98 The Daily Star, Beirut).

In a wave of sweeping and radical reforms introduced in the 1920s and 1930s in Turkey, Kamal Ataturk completely replaced the Islamic law, shari‘a, with the Swiss Civil Code in matters of family law. This change, then, outlawed polygamy and a man’s right to unilaterally divorce his wife. Since before World War II until the present day, civil
marriage has been the only legally recognized form of marriage in Turkey. However, Atatürk's reforms in family law have not been entirely adhered to. There are still many marriages that are performed in exclusively religious contexts, many Muslims prefer to marry only through the legitimizing of shari'a courts, even though they were officially replaced over fifty years ago. Some men still have been able to divorce unilaterally and take more than one wife. The result has been that the Turkish Assembly has had to legitimize millions of civilly illegitimate children (Keddie and Beck 1978:15). The 1980s and 1990s have seen increasing resistance by religious Muslims to the civil government of Turkey. Although it is considered illegal for women to wear Islamic dress in governmental offices and schools, many Muslim women have been asserting their religious identity by wearing the Islamic dress (including the scarf head-covering) at the university, for example. A recent New York Times article reports the case of a veiled medical student who was not permitted to take her examinations because she persisted in wearing her veil. The struggle in Turkey is the direct opposite to that in Lebanon. In Turkey, the only legal option for marriage is through civil channels, and more and more people are seeking legitimizing of a religious option. In Lebanon, however,
there is growing support for adding a civil option in addition to the existing religious one.

Since 1956 Tunisians also have had the option of civil marriage, but shari'a law was not entirely replaced by civil marriage as in Turkey. Some aspects of shari'a law, however, were replaced by the 1956 Personal Status Code which for example outlawed polygamy. Tunisia is the only Arab state that has formally done so, arguing that since the Qur'an requires that all co-wives be treated equally, the impossibility of equal treatment of more than one wife (also mentioned in the Qur'an) justified the state's outlawing of polygamy. Other than Turkey and Tunisia, being married in an Arab country in an exclusively civil context is not possible. Lebanon may soon be the third of the Arab countries to allow civil marriage.

The debate in Lebanon has proved quite interesting. Soon after President Hrawi proposed the optional civil marriage law at his end-of-the-year address in December, 1997, the head of the higher Shiite council, Sheikh Shamseddine, protested the proposal, saying, "the law threatens to undermine Muslim and Christian religious courts and infringe on people's private lives, which can't be ruled by a law common to all sects" (1/3/98 The Daily Star, Beirut). Not surprisingly, most of the opposition to the
proposed law came from religious leaders (who receive some recompense for performing marriages). Lebanon's President Hrawi has argued that the optional civil marriage law should be adopted in order to allow people interested in marrying under civil law to be able to do so without having to travel abroad. He has added that aside from practical considerations, it would be a way to overcome the confessional political system that has long prevailed in Lebanon.

Civil marriage is not a new idea in Lebanon. It was proposed as far back as the 1950s. Supporters of the law have said that it could be the "key to saving the country from sectarian conflict" (2/27/98 The Daily Star, Beirut). Opponents have claimed just the opposite, saying the law would augment national dissent and put the country in jeopardy because it would rekindle divisive religious passions. In a Muslim mufti, Sheikh Qabbani's, words, "civil marriage is against national reconciliation .... Religion is for God. The nation is for God" (3/28/98 The Daily Star, Beirut). It is interesting to note that around this time, Syria encouraged Lebanon to put the civil marriage issue on hold in order to "to spare the country internal unrest amid uncertainty over the situation in the south" (3/27/98 The Daily Star, Beirut). Syria clearly was
concerned over the controversy the proposal had stirred in Lebanon, and would have preferred that open debate on the topic cease. One wonders as well whether Syria might have wanted the debate muted in order to diminish any potential diffusion of pro-civil marriage sentiments in Syria.

In January, 1998, it was reported that the Druze spiritual leader, sheikh Bahjat Ghaith said "people should have the right to choose between a civil marriage and religious one, though, he added, a civil contract is not recognised by the Druze religious law" (1/22/98 The Daily Star, Beirut). He said that civil and religious marriage contracts should be allowed at the same time.

If I said I object to it, will this stop the decision? What is necessary is to keep our tradition and strengthen family ties .... Civil marriage is banned by the Druze religion, but as long as the proposal is for voluntary civil marriage, we have no say in the matter. (ibid)


Summary

The Lebanese case is useful to consider as well as entirely pertinent. The debate in Lebanon and the debate in the Syrian Druze community both are about re-imaginings of
community. The big difference, however, is Lebanon is a country in which there is more room for open debate than there is in Syria, but I claim that within both of these countries, much the same thing is going on in that people are debating changing ideologies of marriage. As such, these debates illustrate that ideology, in its relation to social structure, is dynamic. The increasing number of interfaith marriages is forcing a re-thinking and re-politicization.

At the same time, cultural representations of the social order attempt to make, for example, the prohibition against outmarriage seem immutable and legitimate, beyond change by human agency, thus mystifying the social order. Such cultural representations of immutable social order, in doctrine or local theories bent against change, purport a social order outside of the history of human actions and social relations, and beyond material constraints which are its ultimate determinants.

One of the underlying efforts of my fieldwork has been to offer an anthropologically based understanding of the dynamics of sectarianism in the complicated milieu of the Middle East. The Druze are one among many small minorities who have played influential roles in the region's politics and history. I would claim that the manner in which sects
control and police, or modify, their boundaries is a barometer of social relations and attitudes generally. Anthropology is committed to contributing an "on the ground" perspective to understanding society and culture. In terms of considering the source of the constraints that control or imagine populations, one must begin with the realization that people, not just anonymous states, make their culture and its institutions. Also culture is always "in the making". In other words, ideology in its relation to social structure is dynamic because of the way individuals respond to changing political and economic contexts. In Syria, during my fieldwork, the increased external and internal mobility that country has experienced (via economic outmigration, as well as increased numbers of young adults leaving towns and villages to attend school and work in urban centers) has indeed resulting in increased numbers of outmarriage which, as a result, is fueling debate about ideologies that support certain views of imagined populations -- sectarian, national, or otherwise. This is a period of debate over how a foundational social institution, marriage, should be managed in each of these countries. Systematic attention to these debates offers insight into the contemporary regional concerns and shifting ideologies of sects, religions, and nations.
I grew up with the peach. It had a thin skin touched with fuzz, and a soft matte off-white color alternating with rosy hues. Rodhákinó was its name (rødho means rose). It was well rounded and smooth like a small clay vase, fitting perfectly into your palm. Its interior was firm yet moist, offering a soft resistance to the teeth. A bit sweet and a bit sour, it exuded a distinct fragrance. This peach was known as "the breast of Aphrodite" (o mastós tis Afrodrítis)....

Every journey back was marked by its taste. Summer was its permanent referent, yet its gradual disappearance from the summer markets passed almost unnoticed. A few years ago, I realized the peach was nowhere to be found in the markets, in or outside of Athens. When I mentioned it in casual conversations to friends and relatives, they responded as if the peach is always out there although they did not happen to eat it lately. What they are mainly buying, they explained, is a kind of yermádo-rodhákinó (a blend of yermás and rodhákinó). People only alluded to the disappearance of the older peach by remarking on the tastelessness of new varieties, a comment that was often extended to all food, "nothing tastes as good as the past". (Seremetakis 1994:1)

Nostalgia, it can be said, is universal and persistent .... A memory of childhood can be said, persuasively, to have some permanent significance. But again, what seemed a ... perpetual recession into history, turns out, on reflection, to be a more complicated movement. Old England, settlement, the rural virtues -- all these in fact, mean different things at different times, and quite different values are being brought to question. We shall need a precise analysis of each kind of retrospect, as it comes. We shall see successive stages of the criticism which the retrospect supports: religious, humanist, political, cultural. (Williams 1973:12)

There are many ways that the past is remembered — through sensory embodiment, family histories, the trajectories of national state-making, sagas of local
heroes, nostalgia, memorabilia, and cultural geographies to name but a few sites of remembrance (e.g., Feld and Basso 1996; Seremetakis 1994; Williams 1973). The pages that follow focus on various ways that the past has been remembered and re-made in the Syrian Druze context. Then I discuss how this relates to what we might call Druze identity.

During the course of my fieldwork, I cultivated some rich relationships with individuals in their sixties and seventies. These people spoke to me with candor about their lives. I was a willing audience, and they were patient and thorough considering my often awkward and incomplete understanding of their lives.

This chapter is not focused exclusively on the sensory. However, the sensorial is a jumping off point, a catalyst in the chain of memories and reflections discussed here. As Williams points out, nostalgia is often a way an individual makes commentary on matters of contemporary political and cultural significance. He also emphasizes the necessity of acknowledging the specificity of perspective, that is, who exactly is remembering a particular structure of feeling? In this chapter I rely heavily on the talk of a

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54 Williams, however, is referring to the “witnesses” of the past who speak through the perspective of different literary genres: a speech in
specific group of older men who lived in Suwayda and who spoke to me about their lives when I was there in 1995 and 1996. They asked to remain anonymous. The names I use here are pseudonyms.

Thus the individuals upon whom this chapter depends are those with upwards of seventy years’ perspective on the twentieth century in the Levantine Middle East. They have lived through and seen firsthand the tumultuous and radical changes that have occurred in this region. These changes have been experienced on many levels, from the most immediate sensory level to the intellectual, analytical, and political perspective. The effort is made here to acknowledge the concurrent interweaving of these modes of experiencing history and memory, following Seremetakis’ compelling lead in The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity (1994).

With age often comes a certain cynicism toward the illusion of permanence with which, for example, any nation-state is invested. As such, these individuals offer us a particularly multi-faceted perspective on identity in mid-1990’s Suwayda, Syria. Should this identity be facilely labeled Druze, Hawrani, Syrian, Arab, or some combination of a play, passage in a novel, note in a journal, a poem, or a pastoral. (Williams 1973:12)
these? Any one of these labels falls perilously short of adequately understanding the experience of these individuals' lives.

**Sensory Geography**

Seremetakis bemoans the loss of local varieties of peaches — a casualty of the European Economic Community market expansion into the margins of Europe, including the Greek produce market. Meanwhile in southern Syria, Yusef and Nabih remember a childhood where everything that was eaten was fresh, households were self-sufficient, the barter system was more common than a cash-based economy, and people were healthy. The pharmacy was in the kitchen. Seremetakis and Yusef are both nostalgic about their childhood especially as it compares with the washed-out present, diluted as it is with products that pale in comparison with the ones whose bodily incorporation and intense sensations they recall from their childhood.

Around the middle of the week, they would slaughter a lamb or kid goat. Fresh meat was always in the house. Also there was always fresh milk, cheese, yogurt, butter, and so on. What's more, all of this was of the freshest and most succulent variety. The quality was extremely fine. (Yusef, 1996.03.10)

This type of orange is one of the finest. It is originally from Jaffa. Jaffa is now in Israel. We call this orange *yafawi* ["from Jaffa"]. There was a time when our family would go and bring back oranges from Jaffa. Jaffa is an extremely beautiful city,
surrounded by orange groves [although he has never been there himself]. So, originally these oranges we are eating are from Jaffa. Today they grow these oranges in the fertile plain around Lattakia [a city on Syria’s northwestern coast]. In Damascus there used to a time when all the houses were Arab-style. Every house had trees of oranges, bitter lemons, and grape vines. Small gardens like this were typical of an Arab home. But not anymore .... The grapes that we have, our grapes in the Jebel here, were first cultivated in the mountains of Jordan. The Salti and Ajjunli [kinds of grapes], they are from the towns of Salt and Ajlun. The people there, in the mountains of Jordan, are our relatives. But now the mentality is, "here is a Sunni, and here is a Druze". What foolishness is this? Anyway, we used to go visit them, they would say "welcome". Is there anything better than this? That’s how it was. But, people today don’t think about these connections. They don’t know. (Nabih, 1996.02.22)

Nabih ties together elements of an idealized past as a way to comment on what he sees as the impoverished, divisive, and forgetful present. Oranges and grapes are the vehicle through which he makes the observation that where there once was a region that people could easily traverse there is now a pockmarked landscape riddled with the impediment to movement that international borders create. His nostalgic discourse interweaves the intensity of the sensory with political critique. The trip his parents used to take from the mountains of Lebanon to Jaffa, just south of Tel Aviv, is not possible today. Moreover the categorizations that people employ today, between Sunni and Druze for example, is something he claims is not an artifact from the past, but is rather something that has become
elaborated in the course of the twentieth century. The grapes cultivated in the Suwayda region, such as the Salti and Ajluni grapes named for towns in what is now Jordan, do not carry for most Syrians the history and the rich associations of regional membership (Kulna bayt wahed, "we are all one house") that they do for the members of Suwayda’s senior generation who spoke with me. Although the Druze in Suwayda live closer to the Syrian-Jordanian border than they do to Damascus, travel across the international border is not easy because passports are difficult for ordinary Syrian citizens to obtain. All of these associations and critiques arose for Nabih via the sensory, while we were eating oranges during an afternoon visit.

"A Son of Seventy Years": Health and Incorporation

Good God! how sweet are all things here!
How beautifull the Fields appear!
How cleanly do we feed and lie!
Lord what good hours do we keep!
How quietly we sleep!
What peace! What unanimity!
(Charles Cotton in Williams 1973:24)

The nostalgic past of Yusef and Nabih is, among other things, a healthier and more physically robust past. This is indexed through the vivid imagery of fine fruits, vegetables, and fresh meat in a borderless land of plenty. The comparative health of the individual living in this
idealized past mirrors a particular lifestyle, and thus again comments on an impoverished present. Yusef and Nabih both see the present as impoverished on many levels: nutritional, physical, philosophical, political, social, and cultural. Seremetakis talks at length about the role of the grandmother in raising grandchildren, and the incorporation of the grandmothers' life force through foods she had softened with her own saliva for young grandchildren to ingest. Yusef recalls his grandmother as the one who guarded the health of her progeny with the help of naturally growing herbs that she processed through her kitchen, the pharmacy of the past.

You would see the "son of seventy years" [ibn saba'in sena] for example [i.e., an old man with the vigor of youth]. He had all his teeth and molars. He had all his hair, he wasn't a bald old man like me. His hair was black. The men all rode horses. This isn't what you find today. There was never any need for eyeglasses, never. Even until now, I read without glasses during the day. Or I use them when I read French in order to protect my eyes since the French letters are a little small. That is how I use glasses. Because I am one of those who lived the old life. In my generation everyone was like that. And the generation that preceded us was better than us .... Pharmaceutical medicines are a big mistake, the body becomes dependent on them which in turns destroys the body. Before we used to use what naturally surrounded us and what we knew about according to our experience. There were so many medicinal plants. Today they are all manufactured, simulated .... Every day they drank bitter coffee with cardamom in it. They took the cardamom seed and put it in their mouths. Because it had a pleasing taste and aroma. But at the same time it was medicinal, and helped prevent tooth decay. They
wouldn't get sick. Look, this is what people did naturally according to their experience – the best pharmacy in the world is the kitchen. That's how it was. Our grandmothers would say to us, "my darling, for your health take this cure," and so on, "the kitchen will give you the cure". The kitchen gave them the cure. We collected plants that are in the desert and the hills of our land.

A: And now. What does your "mother" [referring to his reincarnated mother] do if she's sick? Does she go to the pharmacy?

Y: She goes to the pharmacy, but she's not happy about it. She prefers how it was in the previous life, you know [he laughs]. That's what she prefers .... Health was found around the house. (Yusef, 1996.03.10)

Even his reincarnated mother prefers certain things about her previous life over the present one.

A Proud Past: Intransigence and Peasant Heroes

It is a source of great pride that in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Ottoman efforts to incorporate the Jebel ad-Druze were never completely successful. Almost always the Druze put up fierce resistance to Ottoman efforts to infiltrate and control their region, and their relationship with the Ottomans alternated in cycles between (1) uneasy and forced coexistence, via militarily-enforced occupation, and (2) Druze semi-independence. In 1900 and 1905, Gertrude Bell traveled to what is now the province of Suwayda in southern Syria, and made observations about Druze intransigence in the face of Ottoman authority. She was an English writer and traveler whom Edward Said has referred to
as one among several "Orientalists-cum-imperial agents" (Said 1978:197). Bell referred to the Druze in this region as a "turbulent people" who have maintained "semi-independence" from Ottoman attempts to curb their "free spirit" (Bell 1907:149, cited in Firro 1992:241-242).

In the following extracts, Firro and Betts describe a period and events that have been memorialized by people I knew in Suwayda.

In 1908, when the Young Turk revolution renewed Ottoman attempts to incorporate the population by ordering a census\(^{55}\) of the population ... the Druzes' "semi-independence" again asserted itself: they refused [to take part in the census] .... Thirty battalions ... were dispatched to the Jebel. Beacons were soon lit on the hilltops from the Jebel to Mt. Hermon mobilizing the entire Druze community. The Druze leaders realized, nevertheless, that they could never successfully oppose an army of such magnitude. Apart from some resistance in al-Kafr in the south and in Qanawat, they submitted to the government without a fight. The Jebel seemed to be at last under direct control of the Turks, who began to carry out the reorganization that the Ottomans perpetually had failed to implement since 1862. Al-Faruqi took a census which showed that the Druze population amounted to forty-four thousand. Druzes were disarmed, and some ten thousand weapons were confiscated. Conscripts were enrolled. [Six Druze sheikhs including] Dhuqan al-Atrash (father of the famous Sultan al-Atrash who was to lead the Druze revolt against the French in 1925), were all taken away and publicly hanged in Damascus in March 1911 .... When the troops finally pulled out again, however, the Jebel returned to its semi-autonomous state, and it was clear that only a permanent and sufficiently strong military presence could control the

\(^{55}\) The Ottomans tried to "discipline" the Druze, in part through taking a census. This is, as Foucault has well documented, one of many ways a state works toward achieving an "ordering of human multiplicities".
last "lawless" area in the Syrian province. (Firro 1992:242-244)

During 1909-1910 rebellion broke out once again, and after months of vicious warfare the Druze leaders were lured to Damascus by the Turks on the pretext of treating for peace .... resulting in the execution of their leadership, among them the father of the Syrian nationalist figure, Sultan al-Atrash. (Betts 1988:82)

In many historical narratives that were related to me, events such as these served as an indexical springboard to discuss both the relationship between the Druze and outsiders generally, as well as to discuss valued individuals who have served as a barometer for an idealized Druze way of life. For example the recounting of a specific event, such as the hanging of Dhuqan al-Atrash, was used to index both Druze long-term strivings for autonomy, as well as the "noble humility" of Druze heroes. These heroes embodied an ideal way of life that links "the foundation" of Druze identity to a village-based way of life, to living on the land. Both of these narrative trajectories, whether externally- or internally-focused, emphasized the ideals of self-reliance and autonomy, and the holism of a previous life.

In terms of twentieth-century politics and history in Syria, Sultan al-Atrash is probably the most celebrated Druze individual who came from the Jebel ad-Druz region of
southern Syria. Locally, he is admired by many as a kind of peasant hero, despite having come from a long line of wealthy landlords. For my informants, he embodied the ideals of the past, and stood in sharp contrast to a floundering and ungrounded present. The following excerpt, recorded in March 1996, progresses from an account of the hanging of Dhuqan al-Atrash, and then to a description of the Sultan al-Atrash's embodiment of a simpler and glorified bucolic past:

M: Their father was involved in a number of battles against the Ottomans, against the Turks. They were occupying us here.
A: What was his name?
M: His name was Dhuqan. And the Turks were never able to strengthen and fortify themselves enough here to overtake us in the jebel. The men from that generation fought some very [his voice breaks with emotion] difficult battles. Eventually the Turks resorted to this scheme .... They said [to the sheikhs] "We are associates and peers in this matter. Come see us in Damascus as honored guests so that we can talk at great length. We will look into our situation." He [Dhuqan al-Atrash] was a trusting and trustworthy man. So he went to Damascus. They hanged him. This is extreme deception. The Turks are detestable. They actually did this thing! The father of the Sultan was hung. At the time the Sultan was living in exile ....

[Even after the Sultan returned from exile and began fighting the Turks and then the French], he remained a peasant [fellah]. He didn't leave his village. He dressed like a farmer. He worked his land, on his own. He worked by his own hand. He was a peerless individual. He didn't live in the cities. He remained among his brothers ... in the village. And

56 In the cultural realm, the singer Asmahan (1917-1944, 'Amal al-Atrash) and her brother, Farid al-Atrash (1916-1976, nicknamed "the king of the 'oud") distinguished themselves in their respective musical arts, and were/are quite famous and revered beyond Syria.
the village is the foundation [of everything]. Look at us now. We go from the village to the city. He was the opposite of us. He left the city, he did not prefer it over the village. And the right way is with him, not with us. The village is the foundation. If today we had the know-how and skills of the village and if we were there [he gets choked up, his voice wavers], there wouldn’t be [slapping his hands in emphasis] all of this. That was his genius. He was a very intelligent man. [1996.03.13]

Once again, in the discourse of these older men, the ways of the past comment on the poverty of the present. This in itself is not a surprise. The hoped-for cumulative effect of these excerpts is to bring us to some conclusions about the complexity of Druze identity, a problematic term in itself. Are we talking fellah (peasant) history, or Hawrani, Arab, Syrian or Druze? In many ways, the effort to pin down some kind of understanding about identity is an inherently frustrated endeavor, that is, if one hopes for neat and clean categorizations. Identity is made up of multiply interweaving and fluid strands, and is also largely a question of perspective, the focus of a particular moment.

**Mapping Identity: International Borders, Arab Nationalism, and Territorial Nationalism**

Arab nationalism first arose in the nineteenth century, in reaction against the Ottoman empire whose span ranged four centuries, from 1516-1918. Arab nationalism had thus become an important force long before the current
international borders of the Middle East were drawn. Nationalism in the Middle East arose before states existed, to a much greater extent than in Europe for example. For the most part, nationalism was not part of state-building in the Middle East. Arab nationalism in fact tended to stand in fierce opposition to state-building in the form it has manifested since the Second World War. This makes for a situation in which an anomalous relationship exists between nationalist sentiment and political regime.

In countries like Syria, the particular problems faced by successive regimes stem largely from this incongruity between felt membership and official authority, between national identification and political organization. [Moreover] ethnic and regional diversities, and loyalties to tribe, sect, or locale, make the integrative task of most states in the Middle East difficult. [Wedeen 1995:38]

A tension continues to exist between loyalty to an idea of pan-Arab nationalism and loyalty to the state.

Syria is one case illustrative of this tension. In her dissertation, for example, Wedeen describes the role that spectacle plays in Syria in buttressing a cult of President Asad, the leader of Syria for thirty plus years. Wedeen’s analysis elaborates the idea that the cult and spectacles in Syria create a national narrative that does not necessarily compel genuine belief in the nation-state. It does, however, relentlessly clutter public space and through this
specifies "the epistemic system through which obedience and resistance are understood by the participants, and accordingly enacted" (Wedeen 1995:7).

After the First World War, as the Ottoman era came to a close, the Levantine Middle East was split up into the French and British Mandates. Syria and Lebanon were mandated to France, while Palestine and Jordan went to the British. Syria itself became independent in 1945. Between 1958 and 1961 it was part of a United Arab Republic with Nasser's Egypt. But since then it has almost continuously been governed by the Ba'th Socialist Party. These changing arrangements and alliances witnessed over the lifetime of someone in their seventies help to account in part for a certain amount of cynicism when it comes to state-based patriotism. Walid pokes fun at the fact that Jordan is a state, because it is so small.

The day he [King Hussein] went to China, they said, "How many people do you have in Jordan? Why didn't you bring all of them with you on your visit?!! .... It makes no sense at all that two million people makes a country! (1996.01.28)

Although it might be correct to say that individuals such as Walid, Nabih and Yusef identify more strongly with Arab nationalism than they might as patriotic citizens of a state like Syria or Jordan, that would also be oversimplifying. The problem is, as Gelvin (1998a, 1998b) persuasively
argues, that Arab nationalism and Arab identity have come to take a sort of analytical precedence, obscuring the many competing nationalisms and identities that have existed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. "In other words, most historians have -- and continue to -- identify Arab nationalism as the paradigmatic nationalist ideology which, all else being equal, should command the loyalty of the ethnically Arab inhabitants of the region" (1998b:1). I find Gelvin's discussion of "territorial nationalism" compelling and entirely relevant to the nature of sentiment expressed by the older generation I encountered in Suwayda. After making a joke about King Hussein's visit to China, Walid's tone became decidedly more serious as he went on to bemoan the divvying up of what is known as Greater Syria (Bilad al-Sham):

We were divided up into regions. We have relatives in Palestine. We have relatives in Lebanon. We have relatives in Aleppo. We are, you know, we are all a part of the same house [kulna bayed wahed]. One family, you know. One land. One history. But there are these international borders now, I don't know why. Here there is King Hussein. Here there is Yasir Arafat who is now a head of state. Here is Saddam Hussein. Here is Hafez al-Asad. Where are we? Where are we now -- at the end of the twentieth century!? .... Half of the entire area of our Syrian land is across the international border in Turkey. Our land! .... The source of the Euphrates is in our Arab land which Turkey has jurisdiction over. Because for us, our northern border is the Taurus mountain chain. The Euphrates flows from there. [1996.01.28]
Gelvin takes issue with the privileging of Arab nationalism in historical writing, and in fact claims that this is more the product of the assumptions of those writing these histories than it is based on the experiences of those who lived it. He describes a veritable plethora of pre-nationalist and nationalist organizations that emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

By 1919 the notion of Syrian identity had achieved wide popular resonance throughout bilad al-Sham [Greater Syria]. During the interregnum separating the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire and the imposition of a French mandate in Syria, a number of popularly-based committees advocating independence for “Syria within its natural boundaries” won widespread support not only in Damascus, but in most cities from Aleppo in the north to al-Karak [Jordan] in the south. [Gelvin 1998b:2]

This points up a major contrast to those who might claim that Arab nationalism was the most significant anti-Ottoman, anti-French, anti-British grass-roots movement in the early twentieth century. Gelvin has looked at, among other things, the political leaflets that were distributed on the streets of Damascus in the 1920’s. Among those that were archived, he found that nearly four times as many leaflets were addressed to Syrians as were addressed to Arabs. Furthermore, none of these leaflets called for Arab unity, while forty-five percent mentioned the natural boundaries of Syria (ibid). Gelvin’s point is to have us acknowledge and
consider the complexity of nationalist movements in this region, that there was not one overarching form of Arab nationalism.

Sometimes I heard people mourn the collective loss of the territorial integrity of Greater Syria, at other times the territorial emphasis would be more localized, in this case, the focus was on the region known as the Hawran.

Regarding Jordan, half of Jordan belongs to us, up through to the jebel [hilly regions of southern and southwestern Syria]. That includes Azraq and Zarqa [Jordanian towns], all of that region. Those areas comprise half of the western part of the Hawran. They are the plains Hawran. We are all Hawran. All of us here are Hawran. That is our historical name. There are the plains Hawran and the mountain Hawran. The plains Hawran are centered in Deir'aa. And we are the mountain Hawran. We are. That’s us .... So on our land we were able to raise livestock. We and the Bedouin [were able to raise livestock], especially sheep and goats .... When we were born, sixty percent of our economy was based on livestock. Our house owned six hundred heads of sheep.

A: Six hundred??
X: Yes, in our house alone.
A: Between you [pl.] and some Bedouin, right?
X: Yes. Who was raising them?? One of the parliamentarians in Jordan, Sa’ad al-Sarur, you can see him on television. His father and his grandfather, it was us and them who were involved in a partnership raising livestock [he chuckles]. Now he is an engineer and in the Jordanian parliament. But what is it being in the Jordanian parliament? He’s just an employee, you know, a civil servant. In the past his father was a great man, a leader [za’eem], as was his grandfather. Our economy was based on the raising of livestock. [1/28/96]

Thus, two territorial affinities are referred to in these quotes, one refers to Greater Syria (*Bilad al-Sham*, see
Figure 6.1) and the other to a more localized referent, the Hawran.

Figure 6.1: Syria Within Its Natural Boundaries (Gelvin 1988a:x)
As Gelvin points out, Arab identity has been no more or less authentic or compelling than any number of other possible identities. I was mistaken when, early in my fieldwork, I expected there would be a clear and identifiable tension between “Druze”, “Syrian” (i.e., the contemporary state), and “Arab” identities. I expected discreet domains when in fact the affiliations are better described as a question of focus (rather than conflicting domains) and layered expressions of the same basic perspective. Moreover, the contemporary state of Syria figures rather weakly for those over sixty years old. Affiliations and identity were as much regional as anything else. This is what Gelvin would refer to as territorial nationalism.

This chapter has been a suggestive one. It offers a glimpse into the numerous simultaneous affinities several older Druze individuals can index in nostalgic reminiscences.
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS

The central focus of this dissertation has been on the Druze sect's strategies for preserving their sense of separateness and uniqueness while at the same time claiming pan-Arab and patriotic Syrian affiliations. Because the primary focus is on a religious minority, one of the major concerns has been to elucidate notions of relational identity from a Druze point of view. The conclusions reached here include that we cannot say there is some kind of singular distinct Druze identity. It is more accurate to say that there are various identities/affinities/affiliations depending on contexts. Although I admit that this dissertation may be contributing in some ways to the fetishization of "identity", it nonetheless offers insight through a particular case into issues of relational identity which as a universal cultural phenomenon warrant its investigation. It would not be enough to say the Druze of Syria predominantly identify themselves as Druze, Hawrani, Syrian, Arab, or some combination of these. Any one of these labels falls perilously short of adequately understanding the experience of these individuals' lives. This dissertation is an argument against any kind of facilely labeled Druze identity, and is an extended discussion of various facets of
Druze experience, on what it means to be a member of a religious minority in the contemporary Middle Eastern state of Syria in the mid-1990s. Identity might be best understood as affiliations and affinities, multiply interacting levels of meaning, and a question of frequently adjusting focus and perspective.

The Druze community began as a campaign to renew and reform religion within Islam, and resulted in the establishment of a schismatic sect. They were thus viewed as oppositional from the start by the religious mainstream. Their religious marginality has been intensified by their own secretiveness about religious matters, fatwa published by Sunni clerics (religious legal opinion), knowledge that Druze are permitted to practice taqiyya (permissible dissimulation), and their belief in reincarnation, among other things. The occasional fatwa promulgated by the Al-Azhar in Cairo, one of the most important centers of religious authority in Islam, proclaim the Druze to be heretics, and thus not true Muslims. This is a major source of acute discomfort and sensitivity for many Druze, who frequently emphasized to me the importance of their identification as Muslims.

The nature of their sect in terms of its religious principles and practice tends to augment the suspicion and
disregard of some Sunni Muslims, who comprise 80-90% of the Syrian population. The sect is secretive, even Druze who are non-initiates are not permitted to read certain central texts. Muslim outsiders often see this as evidence of the sect's shaky foundations, as proof that there are good reasons the sect does not want to put itself up for scrutiny.

All of these matters, including those that bear on the nature of their identification as Syrian citizens (e.g., the politics of naming as discussed in Chapter Three) as well as those that bear on perceptions of themselves as good or bad Muslims, were among the issues encountered during fieldwork. All these topics fall very broadly under what might be called the issue of ongoing negotiation of Druze identity in Syria. Due to the dynamic of political context, none of the issues mentioned so far were discussed out in the open, at least not at first, and the Druze with whom I spoke were always circumspect about, on the one hand, being sincerely invested in their identification as Syrians, Arabs, and Muslims, while at the same time not wanting to lose or compromise what was special to them about being Druze as a result of those broader affiliations. But because the ground rules for Syrian citizenship and Islamic affiliation tend to be cast in an either/or manner, the subtle
complexity of their multiple affiliations tends to be muted at first glance, as a matter of well-cultivated habit. This dissertation has been in large part an effort to explore and explain this dynamic.
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