

## FROM THE WALLED INNER CITY TO THE URBAN PERIPHERY: CHANGING PHASES OF RESIDENTIAL SEPARATION IN DAMASCUS\*

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Damascus, as well as the other ancient cities in the *Bilād al-Shām* (Greater Syria), is known as a crossroads of Islamic and Christian civilizations. Rather than blending, pursuant to their millennial history of coexistence, however, a dichotomy has emerged between the Muslims and the Christians. Although residential separation between the Christians and the Muslims in the Old City inside the wall (which has surrounded Damascus since Roman Times) has continued since the Arab conquest of Damascus in the 7th century, it assumed another aspect of segregation from the mid-19th century, as the Ottoman provinces exposed themselves to European colonialism. Under the religious protectorate policy of the French, it can be said that the Christian communities were spatially segregated from the surrounding Muslim majority.

Even after the withdrawal of all the foreign troops from the Syrian domain in 1946, the spatial separation of the Christians still can be seen in the Old City inside the wall, but there is no apparent evidence of segregation against the Christians.

Yet, residential segregation itself has not disappeared. Since Independence in 1946, the predominance of Damascus City as the state capital definitely affected the concentration of population (Figure 1). As an immense influx of rural-to-urban migrants, as well as the Palestinian refugees, occurred since the early 1960s, several settlements composed of religious and ethno-regional minority groups have developed in the urban peripheral areas. Thus, new residential separation has emerged. Concerning the exclusive settlements of Druzes and 'Alawis, improvement of political status created certain tension with the Sunni Muslim majority.

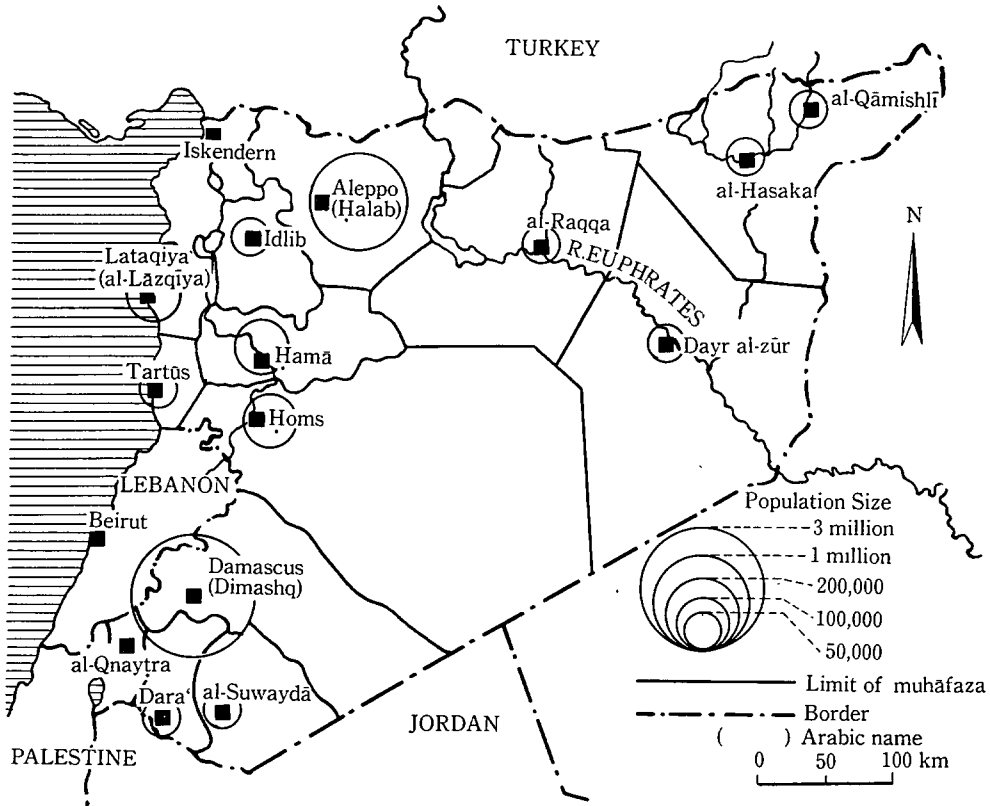
This study is fundamentally concerned with changing phases of residential separation both in the Old City inside the wall and the newly developed urban periphery, but it has foci particularly on:

1. The French concern on residential separation between the Christians and the Muslims from the late 19th century to the end of the Mandate.
2. Formation of minority group settlements in the urban periphery and its implications on the present Ba'ath regime under the leadership of 'Alawis.
3. Re-examination of concept of spatial segregation in the Syrian context.

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FIG. 1 POPULATION SIZE OF THE MAJOR CITIES



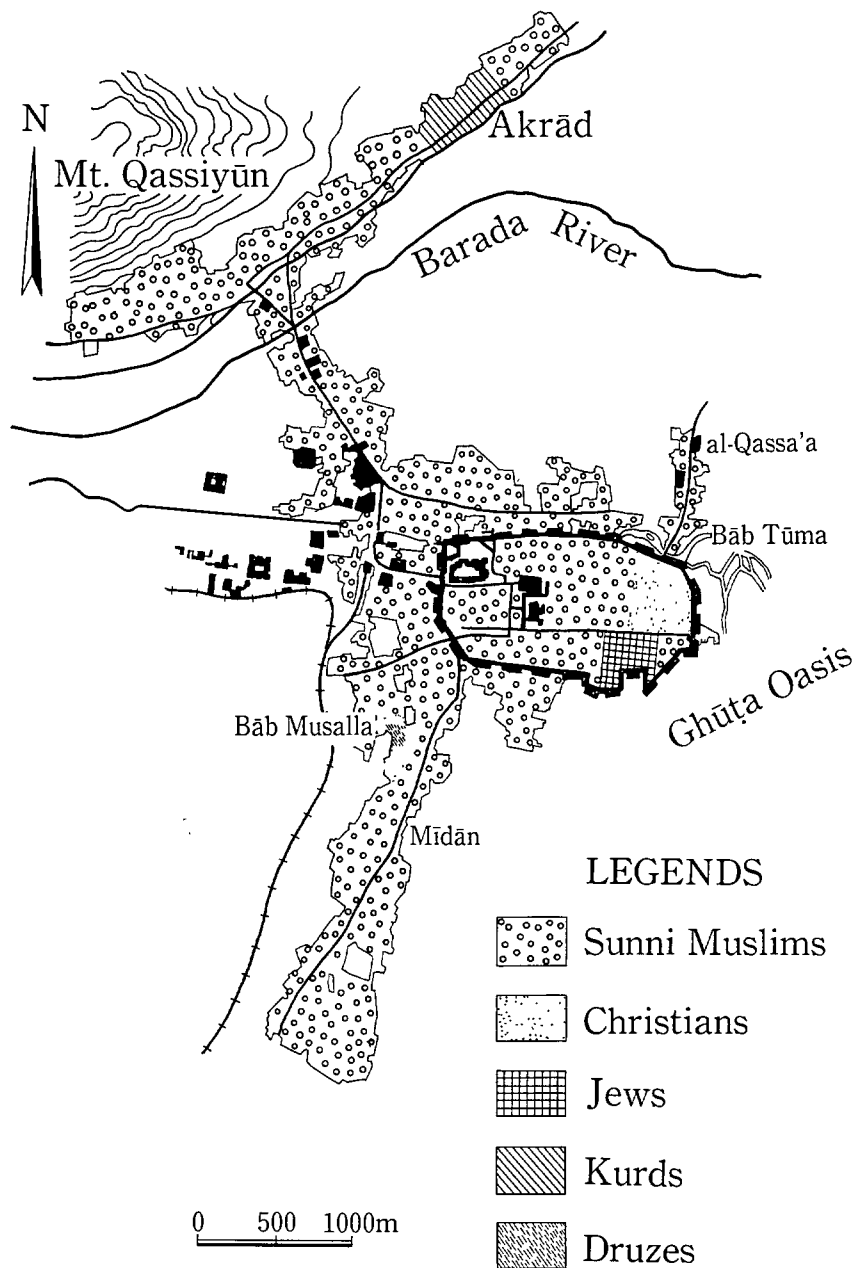
## I. *Christian-Muslim Separation, Re-examined*

### *Reality of segregation to Christians*

As shown in Figure 2, prior to Independence in 1946, there were several settlements of which inhabitants identified themselves with their religion and ethnicity. The oldest and still existing religious communities are the Jews and the Christians whose communities are located at the eastern end of the walled inner city. The area from Bāb Tūma (Gate of St. Thomas), the north-eastern gate of the wall southward to al-Bāb al-Sharqi (The Eastern Gate), is known as the largest Christian quarter in Damascus, and their residences have not been divided according to the sects such as Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic, Syriac, Armenian Orthodox and Catholic, and Maronite.

In the 19th century, the Christians were apparently a small religious minority in Damascus. As shown in Table 1, according to the Ottoman population census of the total population in Damascus, only about 8 percent were Christians (Table 1). As previously mentioned,

FIG. 2 DISTRIBUTION OF ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN THE 1930s.



Source: Thoumin, R. (1937), p. 667.

TABLE 1 POPULATION IN DAMASCUS (SHAM CENTRAL KAZA) BY RELIGION AND ETHNICITY IN THE LATE 19TH CENTURY

Muslim	Greeks	Armenians	Catholics	Jews	Protestants	Latin	Syriacs	Total
98,621	4,251	199	4,784	6,265	61	90	6	114,277

Source: Karpat, K. (1985): *Ottoman Population 1830–1914*, pp. 134–135.

Note: The population is based upon the Ottoman General Census 1881/1882–1893. Sham central kaza includes Damascus city and its surrounding oasis villages.

from the mid-19th century to the Mandate period in the 1920s, the Christians often faced the threat of inter-communal strife with the Sunni Muslim majority. The first and tragic event broke out in Bāb Tūma on July 9, 1860. According to Schilcher, some thousands of Christians were murdered, and their residences were attacked and burned as were several European consulates and missionaries.<sup>1</sup> The mobs mainly consisted of the urbanite Sunni shopkeepers, craftsmen, and peasants, but scores of the Sunni Muslim notables were also executed as the instigators.<sup>2</sup>

This massacre and pillage was, indeed, an outbreak of indignation on the part of urbanite Muslims—in particular, the traders and craftsmen who suffered serious losses in their bazaar market activities. The Christians' privileges in external trade were secured by the Capitulations, which facilitated the import action of European manufactured commodities into Syria. In fact, import and export duties were reduced for the Christians. At the same time, their economic activities as moneylenders were another object of the resentment.

Nevertheless, it should be remembered that thousands of the Christians left alive were sheltered by Muslim merchants and notable families such as the Jaza'iris. Even among the Muslim notables, there was serious factional infighting according to their political stance and interests.<sup>3</sup>

It was certain that the riots in Damascus and the civil war in Lebanon further justified French intervention in the *Bilād al-Shām* on the pretext of protecting the Christians surrounded by the hostile Muslims. Among the European powers, the French had a strong intention of securing a political and economic presence, through its offices as a religious protectorate.

Thus, a blueprint of "segregating the Christians" was drawn up by the French. Even though pressure from the European powers effectively released the Christians from terror, this emotional but persuasive attitude of the French did not change until Independence. It should be added that some French geographers such as Thoumin and Sauvaget commented

<sup>1</sup> Schilcher, L. (1985): *Families in Politics, Damascene Factions and Estates of the 18th and 19th Centuries*, Berliner Islamstudien, Band 2, Stuttgart, pp. 87–90.

<sup>2</sup> Street toughs, nomads, and the Kurdish auxiliaries also joined the rebels. *ibid.* p. 89., see also Khoury, Ph. (1983): *Urban Notables and Arab Nationalism*, Cambridge Middle East Library, London, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, some notable families supporting the riots were also opposed to the Ottoman centralization policy, *Tanzimat* reforms, which were implemented to deprive the notables of their political and economic predominance. For instance, as a part of the *Tanzimat* reforms, the Ottoman government enforced a new Land Code in 1858 at reinforcement of nationalization of land, particularly for the large estates owned by the notable landlords. But naturally, it arose a severe objection from the Damascene notables, and resulted in complete failure.

poignantly on the Christians' segregated life in Damascus.<sup>4</sup>

*Awareness of French imposed segregation*

In 1920, the French Mandate was finally authorized by the European powers at the San Remo Conference, then Damascus fell into the hands of the French troops. Yet, the Christians' economic condition had apparently deteriorated during World War I, for trade with Europe had declined, and a number of their Muslim clients had been lost.<sup>5</sup> In this respect, the Mandate should have been long-awaited by the *comprador* bourgeoisie, but the Christians' political stance on French rule had shifted to keeping a distance during the Mandate.

The Great Revolt, initiated by the Druze uprisings in the southern provinces, extended to Damascus and its surrounding oasis villages in 1925. It was virtually the first resistance against the mandatory power, and it assumed the characteristics of popular, nationalistic, and anti-imperialist movement. The Christians in Damascus again faced the threat of riots, but in public, they did not undertake any political actions either against the nationalist wing or against the French authorities. In short, they adopted a "wait and see" attitude.<sup>6</sup>

It might be true that the Christians feared a recurrence of the July 1860 Riots, however, certain speculation of divergent classes was reflected in the Christians' neutral pose to the Revolt; firstly, for the merchant-moneylending class, a financial exhaustion of the Muslims was unfavorable, so they desired the Revolt to cease in the early stages. Secondly, concerning the craftsmen and peasants, their political and economic status was far from those of the European local agents, hence, they could not find any reason for being involved with the rebels.

Simultaneously, an external factor was also to be indicated, that is intermediation by a notable family. The Jaza'iris again interceded with the rebels for the Christians, not to be attacked.<sup>7</sup> As a result, while some families in Bāb Musalla (adjacent to a base of the Revolt) took refuge in Bāb Tūma quarter, the Christian community as a whole succeeded in escaping injury.

The Christians' behavior appeared to reflect their awareness of their political situation; their survival was not in the hands of the French but in the hands of the notables and newly ascended nationalist forces. They realized that their privileged status as the European agents was already very limited in terms of social security since they were constantly in danger of being attacked by Muslims. By taking a neutral pose to the Revolt, the Christians escaped to some extent from their position of segregation which had been exaggerated by the French. Irrespective of the undeclared threat posed by the Muslim nationalist forces, the Christians did not react by emphasizing their "spatial segregation" after the Great Revolt.

<sup>4</sup> See Thoumin, R. (1931): Deux Quartiers de Damas. Le Quartier Chrétien de Bab Musalla et Le Quartier Kurde, *Bulletin d'Études Orientales d'Institut Français de Damas*, Damascus, Sauvaget, J. (1934): Esquisse d'une Histoire de la Ville de Damas, *Revue des Études Islamiques, Cahier IV*, Paris, Thoumin R. (1937): Damas, Notes sur la Répartition de la Population par Origine et par Religion, *Revue de Géographie Alpine*, Vol. 25, Paris.

<sup>5</sup> Khoury, Ph. (1987): *Syria and the French Mandate*, Princeton, p. 208.

<sup>6</sup> Khoury, *ibid.* p. 206, 208.

<sup>7</sup> As a result of the French bombardment which ruined a considerable areas of market places in the walled inner city, the rebellion narrowed its focus to the French. Furthermore, even for the Christians, the sudden withdrawal of the French troops from Bab Tuma arose a panic and certain suspicion to the French authority. Khoury, *ibid.* pp. 178-179.

*Present phases of residential separation*

Independence came in 1946, and thereafter, the government stance on the Christian communities fundamentally reflected its secularism. In 1953, an item for religion was erased from the contents of authorized identification card, and the freedom of religion was spelled out in the Constitution revised in 1973. Only the President is required to be Muslim, but Syria has no state's religion. Islamic religious education is not a prescribed subject at any stage of the public education. On the contrary, missionary schools operated by the Europeans have been closed down since the 1960s, even after private schools were authorized in 1972. While the secularization policy created a certain dissatisfaction among the largest segment of the population (which is Muslim), it was a practical necessity to achieve national integration of this fragile state.

The language policy declares Arabic as the national language. This has created untold complications in the society at large, which cannot be treated in this short essay, at least for the Christians without ethnic orientation, it has caused little distress. Among the Christians, only the Americans and the Syrians have own languages. In Aleppo where the largest American community exists, they established own private schools in which teaching of American language is authorized. Simultaneously, publications except periodicals are also permitted by the government. Yet this is an exceptional case. For the other minorities whose mother tongue is not Arabic, no rights are given for teaching at school; publication in their languages is also prohibited. These minorities are: Circassians and Kurds among the Muslims, and the Syriac sect among the Christians.

The Christians' residential quarter inside the wall still keeps its exclusive component. Yet, newly married couples take advantage of the opportunity and remove their residences northward outside the wall called Qassa'a which used to be the European residential area. This relocation is partially due to obsolete housing conditions in the Old City, but more importantly, indicates modernization and westernization among Christian nuclear families. Gradually, the Muslims gathered in these new residential areas, mixing with the Christian inhabitants. In the newly developed areas, therefore, it is meaningless to specify some areas as the Christian quarters.

In their native quarter in the Old City, the elderly inhabitants still keep their houses, and the vacant rooms are rented to Christian in-migrants, students and soldiers from the countryside. With this renting system, the inner-city Christian community sustains its non-declining population with the same religious origin. On the other hand, the Muslims never rent rooms because of their socio-religious tradition. In traditional Arabic homes (bayt 'arabi), it is inexcusable for women at home to meet the eyes of unrelated men. In this way, the Muslim community is not maintaining its population in the Old City, contrary to the Christian community discussed above.

The Christians' residential separation is, accordingly, expressed only as a cultural phase, which does not imply any sense of socio-economic discrimination by the Muslim majority. Yet, it should be added that this peaceful situation can be guaranteed to the extent as long as they refrain from any political actions. The "wait and see" attitude still has a very realistic meaning in the present political condition.

## II. *Emergence of Residential Separation on the Urban Periphery*

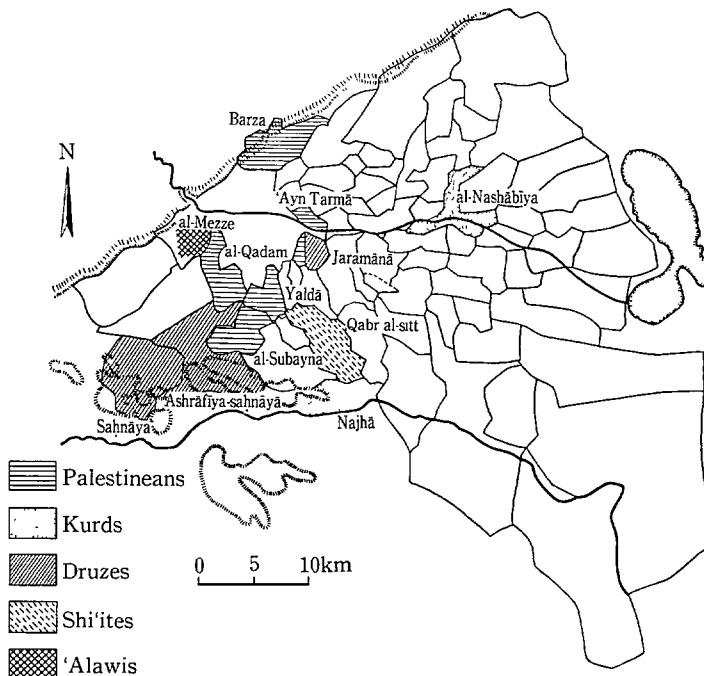
### *An overview of agglomeration*

In contrast to the lack of political focus on the residential separation in the Old City, emergence of various settlements on the urban periphery have created a new source of political unrest. These settlements maintain a certain exclusive character in the sense that each community is composed of the same ethnic or religious minority (Figure 3). The agglomeration has become salient since the 1960s, as an immense influx of rural population flooded into Damascus and its outskirts (Figure 4). As shown in Figure 5, Damascus grew north and northwestward until the mid-1960s, since then, it has tended to spread in easterly and southeasterly directions encroaching on agricultural areas of the Ghūṭa Oasis.

Among the minorities, in the cases of 'Alawis, Druzes, and Kurds, their rural exodus was fundamentally due to serious regional economic inequality. Yet, in-migrations of Druzes and 'Alawis are also characterized by their deeper concerns in political changes after Independence. The Kurdish migration, the latest migratory movement, has occurred since 1985 after the severe drought in Jazira region close to the Syro-Iraqi border in 1983/84.

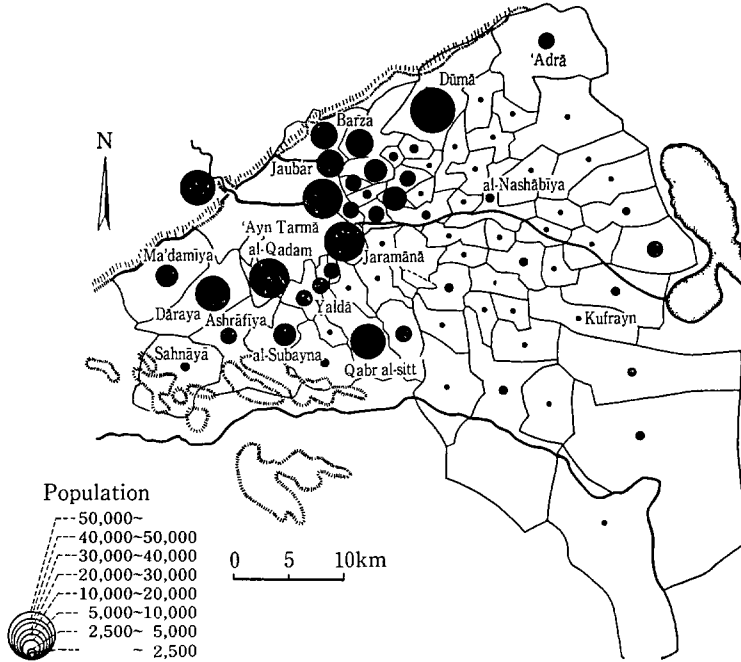
On the other hand, the concentration of Palestineans and Shi'ites was caused by external

FIG. 3 DISTRIBUTION OF MINORITY GROUP SETTLEMENTS



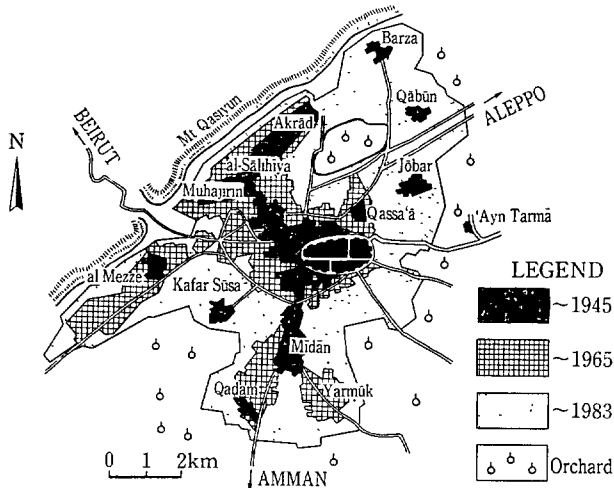
Source: ZIKRAYĀ, A. (1955): Al-rif al-sūrī, muḥāfaẓa dimashq, al-juz' al-'awwal., and field observation in 1986.

FIG. 4 DISTRIBUTION OF POLUATION IN THE SURROUNDINGS OF DAMASCUS



Source: Al-maktab al-markaz li al-ihsā' (1983): 'Adad al-sukkān wa al-usra wa al-masākin, ḥasab al-taqsimāt al-idāiriya 1981, muḥāfaẓa madina dimashq, muḥāfaẓa dimashq.

FIG. 5 URBAN DEVELOPMENT OF DAMASCUS



Source: According to the field observation and DETTMANN, K. (1969): *Damaskus; Eine orientalische Stadt zwischen Tradition und Moderne*, p. 211, SAUVAGET, J. (1934): *Esquisse d'une histoire de la ville de Damas*, *Revue des Etudes Islamique*, Année 1934.



factors related to the Syrian foreign policy. The establishment of Israel in 1948 and its invasion into the Golan Heights in 1967, resulted in the exodus of more than two million Palestinians, of which 10 percent were accepted by Syria as refugees. According to the 1984 census, in Damascus and its surroundings, more than 170,000 Palestinian refugees were taking shelter in scattered camps prepared by the government and UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency). The Shi'ite community is composed of diverse ethnic groups such as settled Iranian pilgrims and Lebanese refugees suffering from the 1982 Israeli attacks in southern Lebanon.<sup>8</sup>

In the following section, I deal with two case studies on residential separation of the settlements of Druzes and 'Alawis, with a specific reference to implications on various inter-communal tension under the present political condition.

#### *Druzes and 'Alawis; two ascended minority sects*

Druzes have been immigrating into the three existing villages in which they formed a firm majority. Most of the migrants previously inhabited in the Hawran region close to the Syro-Jordanian border in which the highland is known as Jabal Druze (Druze Mountains). According to the 1955 census, the population of Jaramana, (the largest Druze settlement in the outskirts of Damascus), was 4,085; but in 1981, it was estimated to be more than 65,000 of which 60 percent were Druzes. But until the mid-1960s, Jaramana was exclusively populated by Druzes.<sup>9</sup> The total number of Druzes inhabiting Jaramana, Ashrāfiya-saḥnāyā, and Saḥnāyā were about 50,000 in the early 1980s, almost one-third of the entire Druze population being in Syria.<sup>10</sup> Yet, in the late 1960s, the government set about restricting the current high density of Druzes in Jaramana by means of constructing a large refugee camp for 25,000 Palestinians nearby in Jaramana.

The migratory movement of Druzes became active since the early 1960s, and is mainly attributed to regional income divergence between Damascus and Jabal Druze region. In Jabal Druze, they were mostly peasants producing cereals such as wheat and barley, but they often suffered serious loss in production due to insufficient water resources.

Moreover, both political and economic conditions in Damascus since the 1960s accelerated their rural-to-urban drift. From the political aspect, it is noteworthy that the Druze military officers gained power in the Ba'th party as a result of the 8 March Ba'th Revolution in 1963. Despite their defeat in factional infighting with the 'Alawis in 1966, the Druzes still sustain a certain influence both in the army and government. On the other hand, the real growth of Syrian economy in the first half of the 1970s augmented industrial investment in Damascus region.<sup>11</sup> It is a common factor affecting cityward migration, and strongly attracted the peasants in poverty such as Druzes and 'Alawis.

<sup>8</sup> Concerning the Shi'ite migration, it should be noted that the 'Alawi which forms predominant force in the government is a subset of the Shi'ite.

<sup>9</sup> The name of this village was remembered by Damascene citizens as an advanced base of the Druze troops at the Great Revolt in 1925. Zikraya, A. (1957): *Al-rif al-sūrī, muḥāfaẓa dimashq, al-juz' al-thānī*, Damascus, pp. 106-108.

<sup>10</sup> Firro, L. (1986): *The Syrian Economy under the Assad Regime*, Ma'oz & Yaviv, A. (ed.) *Syria under Assad*, p. 38.

<sup>11</sup> The major factors which vitalized Syrian economy were the vast increase in oil revenues and the large amount of financial aid from Arab countries after the Syro-Israeli war in 1973. But after the oil boom was gone, Syrian economy has remarkably deteriorated.

*'Alawis: Continued Cityward Migration*

Irrespective of the lack of reliable statistical data, the 'Alawis have been considered as the largest Muslim minority sect in Syria. Their population is estimated to be around one million (10 percent of the national population) in the 1980s. They have been immigrating from the mountain range behind Lataqiya (al-Lazqiya). Their rural socio-economic condition had been truly miserable in several respects. For example, prior to the 1960s, the most 'Alawi peasants used to be tenant croppers or seasonal laborers under the rigorous operation of the Sunni Arab landlords.<sup>12</sup> Along with their economic subordination to the Sunnis, they were also socially discriminated against as a mountain-dwelling heterodox minority. In this context, 'Alawis were spatially segregated from the urbanite Sunnis, not in the narrow sense of intra-urban but in a wider sense of inter-regional.

After Independence, the 'Alawi youths, as well as other poverty minorities, were drawn to the army expecting to improve their economic and social status. In the army, at the same time, they gradually enforced their political influences based upon the Military Committee of the Ba'th party. The Ba'th government was established by the 8 March Revolution in 1963, and through the subsequent military *coup d'états* until 1970, the 'Alawi army officers came to power step by step. At first, the urbanite Sunni officers were exiled in 1963, then, the civilian party members were purged from high-ranking positions in 1966. Afterwards, the Druze and the Isma'ili officers were also exiled successively. Finally, in 1970, General Hafiz al-Asad expelled his intra-communal rivals, and established himself as President in 1971.

From then on, 'Alawis have flooded both Lataqiya City and Damascus, eagerly expecting to gain a share of the privileges. The in-migration toward Damascus shows a clear concentration in al-Mezze Jabal quarter which used to be their military base. Formation of an exclusive settlement, however, does not simply reflect their firm communal affinity but was needed for security purposes.

Under the first Ba'th regime in the 1960s, a series of the socialistic measures, particularly confiscation of private property was reinforced. Naturally, this resulted in a chain of severe reactions particularly from the urbanite Sunni bourgeoisies, but it was still fundamentally accepted by the middle to lower classes to the extent that it contributes to a narrowing of the income divergence. In short, socialistic ideology itself was regarded as a principle for national integration.

Yet, in consequence of the rise of minority sects, this consensus on socialistic policies has been apparently eroded. At least for the predominant Sunnis, the Ba'th regime was no more than that of sectarianism (*al-ta'ifiya*), and they proclaimed that the 'Alawis accumulated property by means of curtailment from the Sunnis. Furthermore, in the early 1980s, through the very severe suppression of Muslim Brotherhood uprisings, the 'Alawi community became a target of nationwide resentment from the Sunnis.

In fact, in the early 1980s, a considerable number of the 'Alawi party members were murdered by terrorism. Under such political circumstances, 'Alawis inevitably separated themselves from the major Sunnis as a result of apparent tension. In general, they would

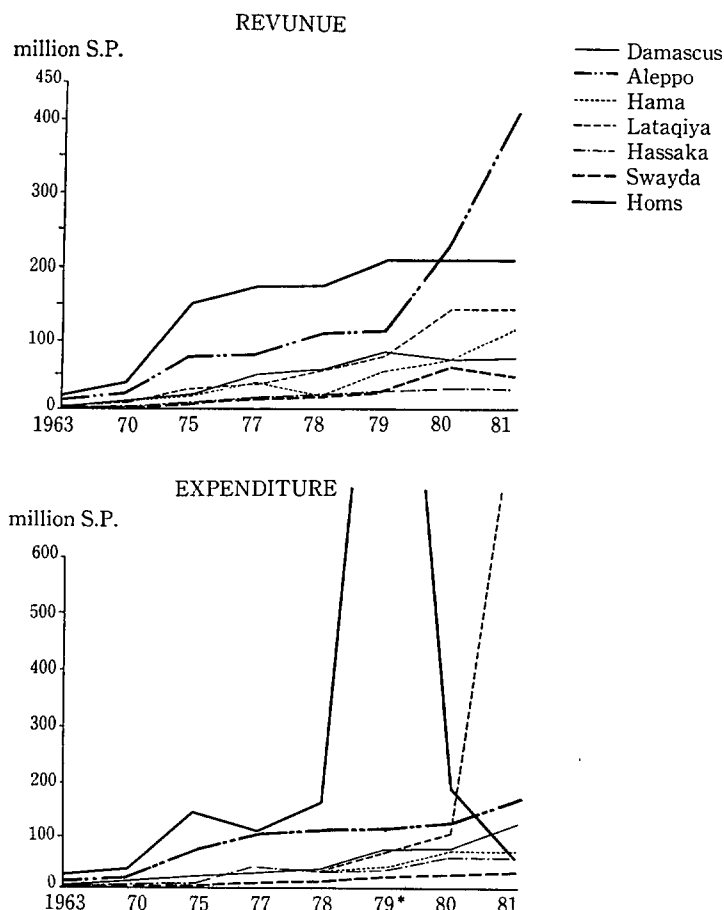
<sup>12</sup> Van Dusen, M. (1972): Political Integration and Regionalism in Syria, *Middle East Journal*, No. 26, p. 132.

not resettle outside of the initial settlement in al-Mezze. Continuous cityward migration of 'Alawis has been, consequently, required to maintain their dominance and security of life.

*Centralization of power and sectarianism; background*

As Tibawi indicated, the state of Syria was shouldered with the heavy burden of Independence.<sup>13</sup> The burden was composed of the following two difficult questions: firstly, how to achieve national integration in the pluralistic Syrian society which is structured along tribal, ethnic, religious, and regional lines. Secondly, how to curtail the urban notables of their political, economic, and social privileges.

FIG. 6 REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE BY MUHAFAZA (1963, 70, 75, 77-81)



Source: Central Bureau of Statistics (1982): Statistical Abstract.

\* According to this statistics, the expenditure of Damascus Muhafaza in 1979 was 1,450,144,000 Syrian Pound.

<sup>13</sup> Tibawi, A.L. (1969): *A Modern History of Syria, including Lebanon and Palestine*, London, pp. 379-421.

The Syrian domain was artificially created by various "agreements" beginning with the Sykes-Picot Agreement to the June 1939 Franco-Turkish Agreement concerning the ceding of Alexandretta to Turkey. As a result of division of the Ottoman provinces in the *Bilād al-Shām* by Britain and France, various minority groups were confined inside the state territory. Moreover, under the French Mandatory policy of divide and rule, 'Alawis and Druzes established "*etats*," with separate jurisdictional rights from the Sunni Arabs. Initiation for the sectarian tendency was, hence, given by the French.

At the first stage of state building from 1946 to 1963, sectarianism by the minority groups was not actualized, although regional imbalance with ethnic and religious orientation was scarcely reduced. Through this period, particularly under the Syro-Egyptian Union between 1958 and 1961, the government focused its endeavor on the expulsion of urban notables. The Land Reform in Damascus region which was implemented between 1958 and 1969, was successful at least in exiling these notables. But after denunciation of the Union in 1961 and the subsequent two years, a chain of conflicts threw the state into serious political confusion, and worsened its economic condition. The party experiencing this strife was very factionalized, yet, it should be stressed that most of them had an "urban" orientation.

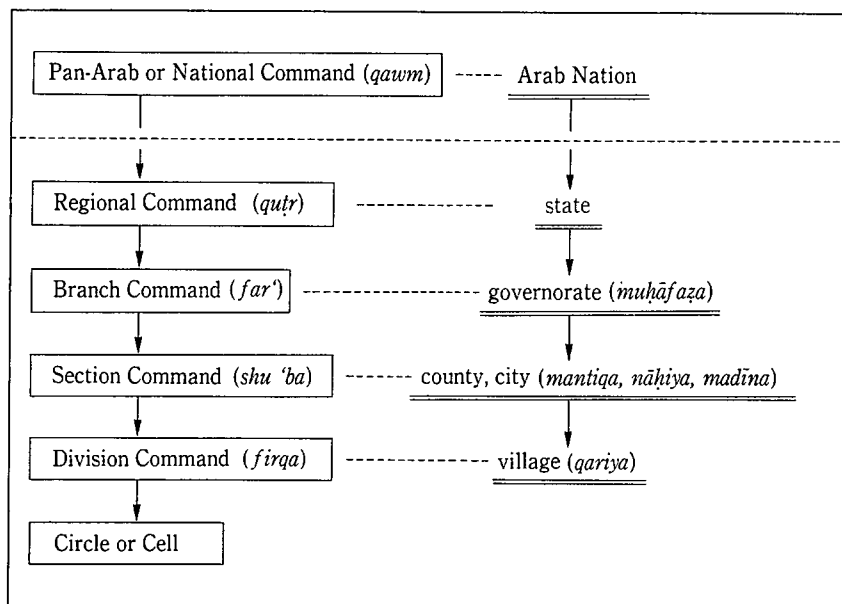
When the Ba'th party gained power in 1963, the initial phase of national integration already faced serious difficulties. In parallel with the socialistic measures, the Ba'th government reinforced the centralization of an administrative system both in economic and political aspects. As shown in Figure 6, the revenue of Damascus Muhafaza has kept a noticeable predominance since the 1970s, and it is clear that this superiority reflects the state local administration policy, for the major revenue sources at the prefectural level are composed of various types of state subsidies. Investment expenditure of Damascus Muhafaza in 1969 also shows a similar tendency (Table 2).

TABLE 2. INVESTMENT EXPENDITURE BY MUHAFAZA (1,000 Syrian Pound)

Muhafaza	1960		1969		1981	
Damascus	13,543	(52.3%)	4,336	(38.4%)	126,093	(12.6%)
Aleppo	8,178	(31.6)	2,045	(18.0)	119,278	(12.0)
Homs	755	( 2.9)	1,298	(11.4)	92,250	( 9.2)
Hama	446	( 1.7)	574	( 5.0)	85,614	( 8.6)
Lataqiya	1,173	( 4.5)	296	( 2.6)	128,308	(12.9)
al-Hasaka	849	( 3.3)	574	( 5.0)	82,220	( 8.2)
Dayr al-zur	478	( 1.9)	85	( 0.7)	24,276	( 2.4)
al-Swayda'	130	( 0.5)	274	( 2.4)	94,450	( 9.6)
Dara 'a	328	( 1.3)	405	( 3.6)	103,388	(10.4)
Idlib	—		446	( 3.9)	86,303	( 8.6)
al-Raqqa	—		496	( 4.4)	6,597	( 0.7)
Tartus	—		517	( 4.5)	43,958	( 4.4)
al-Qnaytra	—		—		4,497	( 0.4)
Total	25,880	(100.0)	11,376	(100.0)	998,726	(100.0)

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstract, 1961, 1970, 1982.

FIG. 7 HIERARCHICAL ORGANIZATION OF THE BA'TH PARTY



Simultaneously, the local administration system is firmly supported by the "Command" organization of the Ba'th party at every administrative level, from the Division Command at the village up through the Regional Command of the state, and its suggestion is usually equivalent to government instruction (Figure 7). The function of Command should have been determined by the People's Council, the membership of which is drawn from lower, popular strata, however, by the 1968 draft law, the Council was forced to be subservient to the Regional Command of the party.<sup>14</sup> Along with the party, the local administration system itself is under control of the Ministry of the Interior. Moreover, the strongest organizations which sustain this centralized power are, undoubtedly, the state army and its Intelligence Bureau.

With such strong backing of the state administration system, local autonomy has been restricted to a great extent. The 1969 Provisional Constitution defined the Ba'th party as the leader of society and the state, but deleted all references to freedom of assembly and association.<sup>15</sup> In fact, uprisings by the Muslim Brotherhood in Aleppo and Hama were subjugated by rigorously reinforcing troops of state army. This government action succeeded in awakening the people in these two cities that any anti-government actions or regionalism movements would be violently suppressed by the government forces.

Furthermore, the Ba'th party itself changed its fundamental character and composition. The secular and socialistic ideology of the Ba'th attracted minority sects such as 'Alawis and Druzes on issues of discrimination and poverty. Their rise in the party definitely

<sup>14</sup> Petran, T. (1972): *Nation of the Modern World, Syria*, London, p. 233.

<sup>15</sup> Petran, *ibid.*, p. 233.

TABLE 3. POPULATION CHANGE IN DAMASCUS AND ALEPPO

	1880s-90s <sup>1</sup>	1906/7 <sup>1</sup>	1932 <sup>2</sup>	1955 <sup>3</sup>	1960 <sup>4</sup>	1970 <sup>4</sup>	1981 <sup>4</sup>
Damascus	114,277	362,161	216,000	423,382	529,963	836,668	1,112,214
Aleppo	516,273	547,477	232,000	417,886	425,467	639,428	976,727

- Source: 1. Karpat, K. (1985): Ottoman Population Census 1830-1914.  
 2. David, J.C. (1980): Alep, La Syrie d'aujourd' hui, XII, ed. by A. Raymond, CNRS, p. 391  
 3. Central Bureau of Statistics (1960): Statistical Abstract.  
 4. Central Bureau of Statistics (1982): Statistical Abstract.

strengthened the sectarian tendency of the Ba'th. A remarkable increase of investment expenditure for Lataqiya Muhafaza in the early 1980s obviously indicates this tendency (Figure 6, Table 2). Indeed, the slogans for secularism and socialism gave them enough reasons to consolidate their control to the former ruling class of the Sunni Muslim majority.

Thus, national integration of Syria has been implemented under the 'Alawi's sectarian leadership of the Ba'th party in a relatively weakened national cohesion. By means of these centralizing measures under the Ba'th regime, the population of Damascus has remarkably increased since the 1960s (Table 3, Figure 7). And on account of its sectarian tendency, formation of exclusive settlements by the minorities has had much more significance than usual rural-to-urban migration.

### III. Future Prospects

Since the late Ottoman Period in the 19th century, various inter-communal tension has been focus of Syrian political life. Simultaneously, the tension has characterized residential separation to religious and ethnic minorities in the phase of segregation. But as was examined, in the city of Damascus, residential separation of the minorities itself did not *a priori* create discrimination on the part of the Sunni Arab majority. At least in the intra-urban scale, social discrimination concerning their religious or cultural life became salient only when the minority gained dominant positions and privileges, as the Christians did during the Mandate period and the 'Alawis since the 1970s.

However, the urbanite Sunnis who were dominating the state power through the first two decades after Independence, scarcely paid attention to the inter-regional imbalance, even though it was perceived as a religio-regional and ethno-regional inequality by the minorities. In this context, the present residential separation of 'Alawis and Druzes might be a sort of "contra-segregation" of the privileged minority against the Sunni majority, yet it never implied any sense of socio-cultural discrimination against them.

Will this separation be dissolved, or reduced in its tension between the 'Alawi and the Sunni majority? As the case of the Christians exemplified, the 'Alawi-Sunni tension too, may be dissolved in the future. Realistically speaking, though, people generally doubt whether the resolution of this tension will come about so readily. In fact, the government announced that it will grant amnesty to political offenders of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1985. At the same time, the Metropolitan Defence Guards under the direct control of

President's brother, Rifaat Asad, was transferred to the regular army. And its post in al-Mezze quarter neighboring on the 'Alawis settlement was altered to a public park.

Yet, it should be noted that these measures partially reflect the state economic depression. The balance of payment has worsened into a critical situation since the beginning of the 1980s, due to a decrease of oil revenues, being cut off from foreign aid, and increasing military expenses in Lebanon. Indeed, the government cannot afford to disburse funds to maintain the security of internal politics.

Even assuming that 'Alawi-Sunni collective leadership is established in the future, it is not certain that it will be able to reduce other inter-communal tensions. In this connection, a suggestive event occurred in the spring of 1986. A conflict took place in an oasis village between the Kurdish migrants and local police at the Kurdish spring festival. The Palestinians and the Shi'ites on the urban periphery are also sensitive to the Syrian foreign policies with the surrounding countries, even toward Iraqi-Iranian relations after the cease fire.

For the 'Alawi leadership by the mid-1980s, the agglomeration of minorities forming exclusive settlements had certain effects on increasing subtle tension between the urbanite Sunni majority and the surrounding minorities. Unlimited rural-to-urban migration, therefore, has been tacitly accepted without any substantial restriction. In this context, the agglomeration itself is a phase of spatial configuration by the state power to protect its security.

However, it should be also stressed that each minority group has its own political stance in regard to the present Ba'th regime. Thus, these settlements on the urban periphery are to be considered as a double-edged sword for the Ba'th government.