AL-KHĀLIDĪYA:
DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL FORMATION OF A SQUATTER
SETTLEMENT ON THE URBAN PERIPHERY OF ALEPPO

Masanori NAITO

I. Introductory Remarks

Aleppo (Ḥalab in Arabic), the second largest city in Syria, is located near the north-western border to Turkey (Figure 1), and has developed remarkably in the past twenty years. According to official population census figures, its population increased from 425,467 in 1960 to 976,727 in 1981. As in other big cities in developing countries, in Aleppo, rural-to-urban migration has increased since the early 1960s, and squatter settlements have rapidly expanded on the urban peripheries.

However, the squatter settlement in the study area differs from the ordinary concept of low-income housing areas in the Third World in the follow-ing respects: firstly, the spatial pattern in the squatter housing area is much more orderly, as though it has conformed to some urban plan. Secondly, the income level of the residents is almost the same as that of the urban working class, and their standard of living is fairly good. Thirdly, there are no security problems, and the crime and offender rate is very low. And fourthly, the squatter housing mostly occupies private land, which the inhabitants acquired by purchase from the previous landowners. Consequently, in this study, the term "squatter settlement" should be understood to refer only to the fact that residents uniformly fail to formally register the otherwise legal transac-tion of buying property. They do this to avoid taxation.

This study is generally concerned with the formation process of squatter settlements on the urban periphery, with specific reference to the urbanization of Syrian cities which accompanied national integration. And it has also some specific foci: first, municipal and government urban policy concerning squatter settlements; second, characteristics of development of al-Khālidīya in compari-son with other squatter settlements in Aleppo. This study deals with a selected settlement, al-Khālidīya (Figure 2), which consists of in-migrants from rural areas near Aleppo City.

In addition, this monograph is a partial report on my studies related to the urbanization of Middle Eastern cities in the process of national integration. It should be stressed that it was my intention to concentrate especially on the

effects of urbanization on government policy for national integration and *vice versa* in the pluralistic Syrian urban context which is structured along tribal, ethnic, religious, and regional lines. When the Syrian domain was artificially created as a result of the divide and rule policy of the British and French in the former Ottoman provinces, various social groups, hitherto relatively unrestricted, were confined inside the state territory. Thus, as Tibawi (1969) indicated, after Independence, Syria was shouldered with the heavy burden of achieving national integration.[1] Urbanization, as a consequence of rural-to-urban migration, has contributed to further complicate the relations of the various groups in Syrian cities which became centers for struggles between sectarian forces based upon these social groups. Thus, urbanization itself has significantly unsettled domestic politics.

The field research for this study was conducted for six weeks in the summer of 1986 with the generous cooperation of the General Directorate of
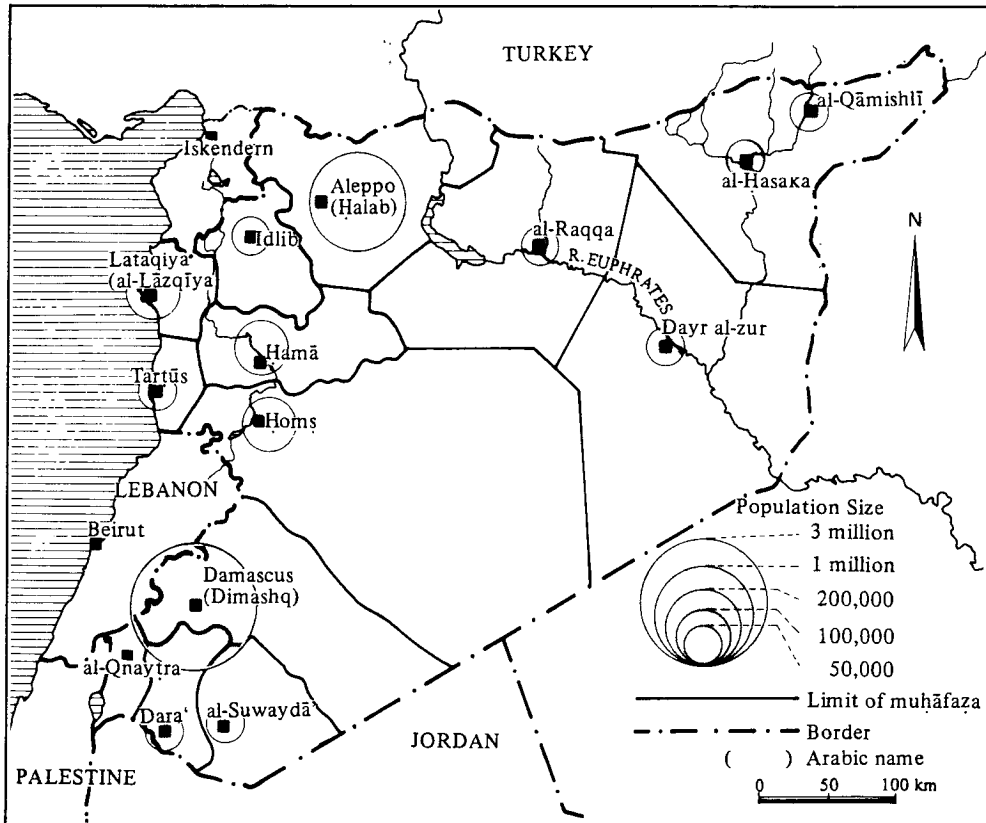

Figure 1   Administrative Unit of Syria

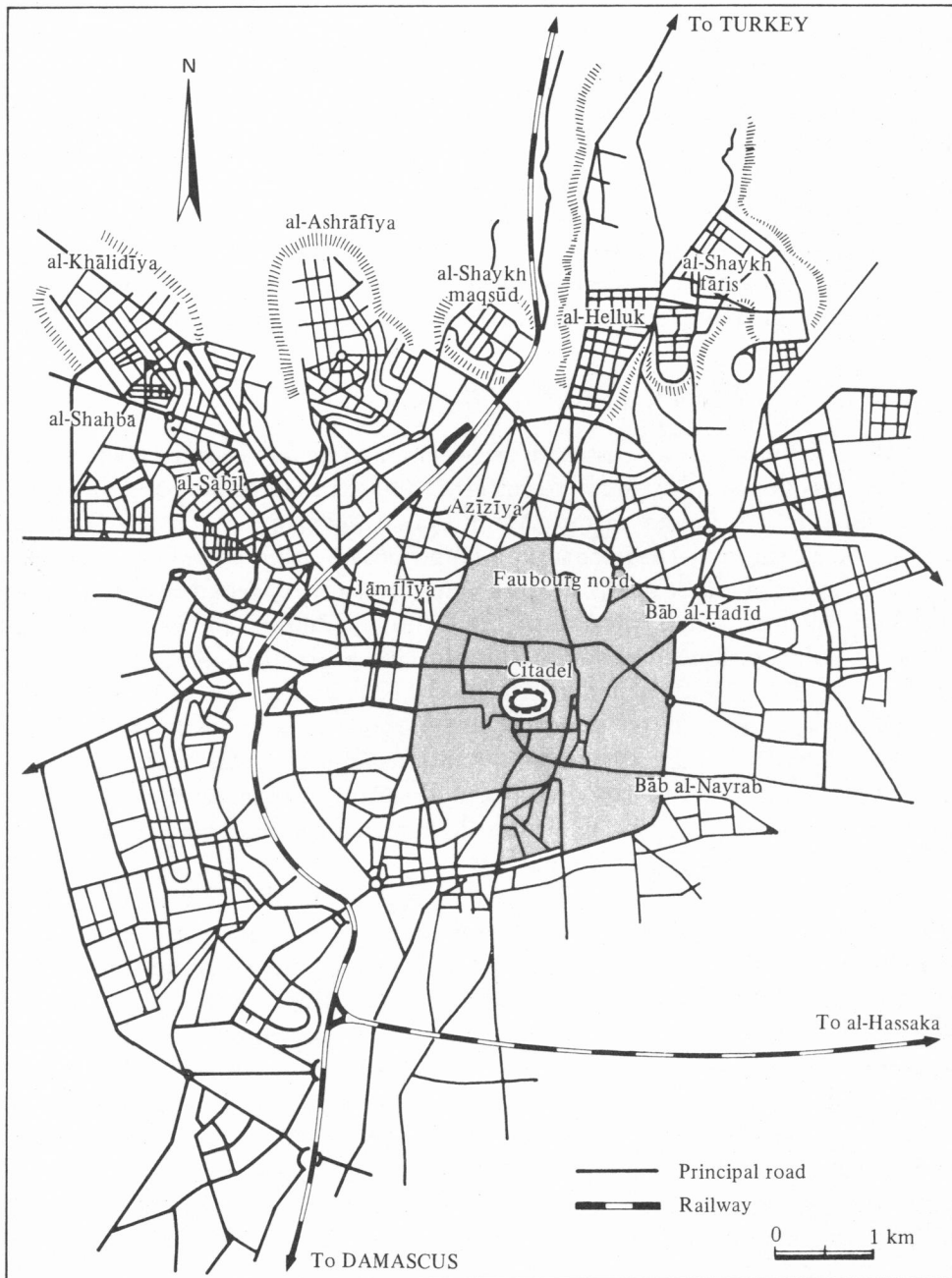1   Tibawi, A.L. (1969): *A Modern History of Syria,* Macmillan, London, p. 379.

Figure 2   Aleppo City

Antiquities and Museums both in Damascus and Aleppo. For help in this initial phase, I am especially obliged to Dr. Afif Baḥnassi, Dr. Waḥīd Khayyāta and Dr. Maḥmūd Ḥaraytānī, without whose official and private support, this research could not have been accomplished. My sincere thanks also go to Mr. Hammido Hammada, staff member of the National Museum in Aleppo who worked with me in al-Khālidīya. In the final stage of the study, I received valuable assistance from Prof. Beverly Nelson who proof-read my paper, and from Miss Keiko Sato who painstakingly drew maps and did secretarial work. Last but not least, my deepest gratitude goes to Prof. Dr. 'Ādel 'Abdulsalām who has given me many suggestions and ideas since I began my studies of Syria.

II. An Overview of Urbanization in Aleppo

Aleppo, known as a crossroads between Eastern and Western civilizations, originally developed as a center for internal and external trading and an important logistical base in the eastern Mediterranean World.[2] After the Ottoman occupation in the mid-16th century, Aleppo became the capital of a *vilayet*, a local administrative unit of the Empire whose territory reached to the southern Turkish provinces. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent period of colonization, however, Aleppo lost such prosperous northern hinterlands as Gaziantep and Iskendern, formerly centers for agricultural products and livestock, and the latter an important harbor for exports. These provinces were ceded to Turkey by enactment of various "agreements" from the Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916 for division of the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire to the June 1939 Franco-Turkish Agreement concerning to the ceding of the territory of Iskendern to Turkey.[3]

Independence came in 1946, and thereafter, in the newly born Syrian Arab Republic, both Damascus and Aleppo burgeoned. Yet, at least in terms of population growth, Aleppo has been relegated to secondary importance (Table 1). Although Aleppo had an advantage over Damascus with respect to the size of its outlying areas, the creation of the Syro-Turkish border and the political predominance of Damascus as capital of the Republic definitely affected the commercial activities of Aleppean merchants. In addition to this, through the process of national integration particularly under the Ba'th regime since 1963, all regional political movements have been strictly suppressed by the government, the leadership of which is in the hands of military officers of religious minority origins. As far as the government policy for local administration is

---

2 Concerning the commercial activities of the Aleppen merchants in the middle ages, see Gaube, H. and Wirth, E. (1984): Aleppo, Dr. Ludwig, Wiesbaden, pp. 228-272, and Sauvaget, J. (1941): *Alep*, Paul Geuthner, Paris, pp. 241-246.

3 The ceding of Iskendern (Alexandretta) was implemented by a completely unilateral renouncement of article 4 of the mandatory rule. Consequently, the Syrian government has never approved it. See Tibawi, *op. cit.*, pp. 352-353.

concerned, Aleppo has the status of a provincial center or *markaz al-muḥāfaẓa* (prefectural capital) to maintain internal security and national cohesion of the state.

This imbalance of development between Damascus and Aleppo since Independence directly reflected on their paths of urbanization. As David (1978) indicated, the basic difference between the urbanization of these two cities can be observed in their spatial patterns. He said that the urbanization of Damascus is a process of pseudo-urbanization as immense population agglomerates on the periphery, whereas in the case of Aleppo, the expansion of the built-up area seems to be rather compact.[4]

Table 1. Pupulation Increase in Damascus and Aleppo

	1932 (1)	1960 (2)	1970 (2)	1981 (2)
Damascus	216,000	529,963	836,668	1,251,028
Aleppo	232,000	425,467	639,428	976,727

Source: (1) David, J.C. (1980): Alep, in Raymond A. (ed.), *La Syrie d'aujour d'hui*, C.N.R.S., Paris, p. 391, (2) Central Bureau of Statistics (1982): *Statistical Abstract*.

Note: These numbers from the official sources are apparently less than actual population, because the squatters are excluded to a considerable extent. According to reliable information from the water supply authorities, the population is estimated to be 3 million in Damascus City, 1.5 million in Aleppo City in 1986.

As he pointed out, the orchard areas immediately surrounding Damascus City have been encroached upon by urban exodus outward from the walled inner city as well as by rural-to-urban migrants from all over the country. Consequently, most of the urban fringe settlements assumed a heterogeneity in their social structures composed of diverse social groups. However, some religio- and ethno-regional minority groups such as the Alawi and the Druze did form exclusive settlements in certain existing villages in which their relatives already had footholds. As military officers from these minority groups rose to positions of power both in the army and in the Ba'th party after the early 1960s, a great proportion of the rural population of the same minority origins flooded into Damascus to compete for their share of privileges. In such settlements, society is structured on religious or ethnic lines, and it maintains considerable homogeneity. Although these settlements are dispersed on the urban periphery, the major Sunni population in Damascus City felt some threat that they were surrounded by the minority sects.[5]

---

4   David, J.C. (1978): L'Urbanisation en Syrie, *Maghreb-Mashrek*, No. 81, p. 46.
5   Naito, M. (1987): Crisis of Kufrayn Village in the Oasis of Damascus, *Geographical Review of Japan*, Vol. 60 (Ser. B), No. 2, p. 155.

One of the most important problems for the Ba'th government which was established in the 8 March Revolution in 1963, was how to administer the majority Sunnis whose economic and social prestige had been reduced with the ascendance of minority sects. In this respect, the agglomeration of the minority oriented population on the urban periphery is certainly effective in preserving a subtle tension between the Sunni citizens and the religious minority populations. Thus, unlimited rural-to-urban migration has been tacitly accepted by the government and municipal authorities as a *de facto* phenomenon, even though basic urban services such as water and electricity supply are already stretched beyond capacity.

Table 2. Internal Migration to Damascus and Aleppo City until 1970

Previous Residential Place (muḥāfaẓa)	Damascus			Aleppo		
	Total (1)	Rural	Urban	Total (1)	Rural	Urban
Damascus City	—	—	—	5,902	—	5,902
Damascus	27,119	17,590	9,518	894	458	435
Ḥoms	15,528	6,619	8,897	2,399	657	1,742
Ḥama	14,059	4,130	9,923	2,426	505	1,920
Tartus	6,476	3,777	2,681	197	46	149
al-Lazqīya	13,127	6,686	6,436	2,982	973	2,008
al-Raqqa	629	139	489	1,814	427	1,386
Idlib	5,576	3,304	2,532	17,161	9,390	7,768
al-Swayda'	7,389	5,126	2,558	353	164	189
al-Ḥassaka	3,559	757	2,798	5,783	833	4,950
Dayr al-zūr	5,365	1,089	4,214	1,891	290	1,600
Dara'	16,302	11,224	5,046	321	141	180
al-Qunaytra	46,485	31,781	14,683	427	142	285
Aleppo	14,561	3,132	11,423	67,950	53,893	14,057(2)
Total	176,175	95,354	81,198	110,500	67,919	42,571

Source: Central Bureau of the Statistics (1970): *Population Census in Syrian Arab Republic 1970, Vol. 1.*

Note: (1) This total number is summed up the rural and the urban migrants, but includes some answers which did not state their origins.

(2) From the other cities in Aleppo Muḥāfaẓa.

This distinctive feature of urbanization in Damascus can be attributed to the extreme centralization of political power that resulted from the process of national integration. In Aleppo, however, urbanization has advanced at a moderate pace. Table 2 shows the number of in-migrants according to previous place of residence until 1970. Although the exact period of migration cannot

be adduced from these data, some characteristics of the migratory movement to Aleppo are apparent. Firstly, the in-migrants were mostly from rural areas in Aleppo Muḥāfaẓa and neighboring Idlib Muḥāfaẓa. In short, the scale of migration was much smaller than that to Damascus, both in the spatial and the quantitative senses. As no more recent demographic data than the 1970 census is available, it cannot be said definitively whether this trend has continued. However, at least from my field observation in 1986, rural-to-urban migration toward Aleppo seemed to be still limited in the scale, from the northern provinces such as Aleppo, Idlib, and Ḥassaka Muḥāfaẓa. At the same time, the formation of newly built-up areas on the urban periphery still retain a compactness of their socio-economic structure, that is to say, each settlement maintains its homogeneity in economic or ethnic terms. But it should be stressed that the municipal authorities of Aleppo have never taken a *laissez-faire* position on the administration of the newly built-up areas, particularly of squatter housing areas. The municipal housing program on the squatter area will be discussed later in the case study of al-Khālidīya settlement of Aleppo.

As shown in Figure 3, the process of urbanization in Aleppo and its surrounding area has particularly advanced in three directions outwards from the walled Old City, toward the north, east, and west. The major trend of development since the early 20th century has been in the north-westward direction; hence the southern part of the walled city seems to be left out of further urbanization. The area inside the wall, called *madīna* in Arabic, developed from the 8th to the 16th century as the urban center for administration and commercial activities, and even now a number of *khān* (caravansaray) and *sūq* (covered market) surround the citadel. The immediate outer area which is now regarded as a part of the Old City, developed between the 16th and the 18th century, but it can be subdivided into two districts according to socio-economic status.

The area outside the nothern wall, called *faubourg nord* by the French, developed as a distinctive Christian quarter. There still remain several cathedrals and *ṭā'ifa* (center for religious sect), however, the Christian population has decreased since the beginning of this century. On the other hand, the area outside the eastern wall from Bāb al-Ḥadīd in the north to Bāb al-Nayrab in the south, is known as an area of settlement for migrants from the eastern provinces. Although there remain some important buildings of the Mamluk Period, this area developed particularly in the Ottoman Period and, now as then, most of the inhabitants consist of villagers, nomads, and livestock merchants from the Syrian Desert. They still retain strong relations with their former territorial and tribal communities and are clearly distinguished from the urban Aleppeans by their distinctive social life.

Some symptoms of modern urbanization were already emerging on the
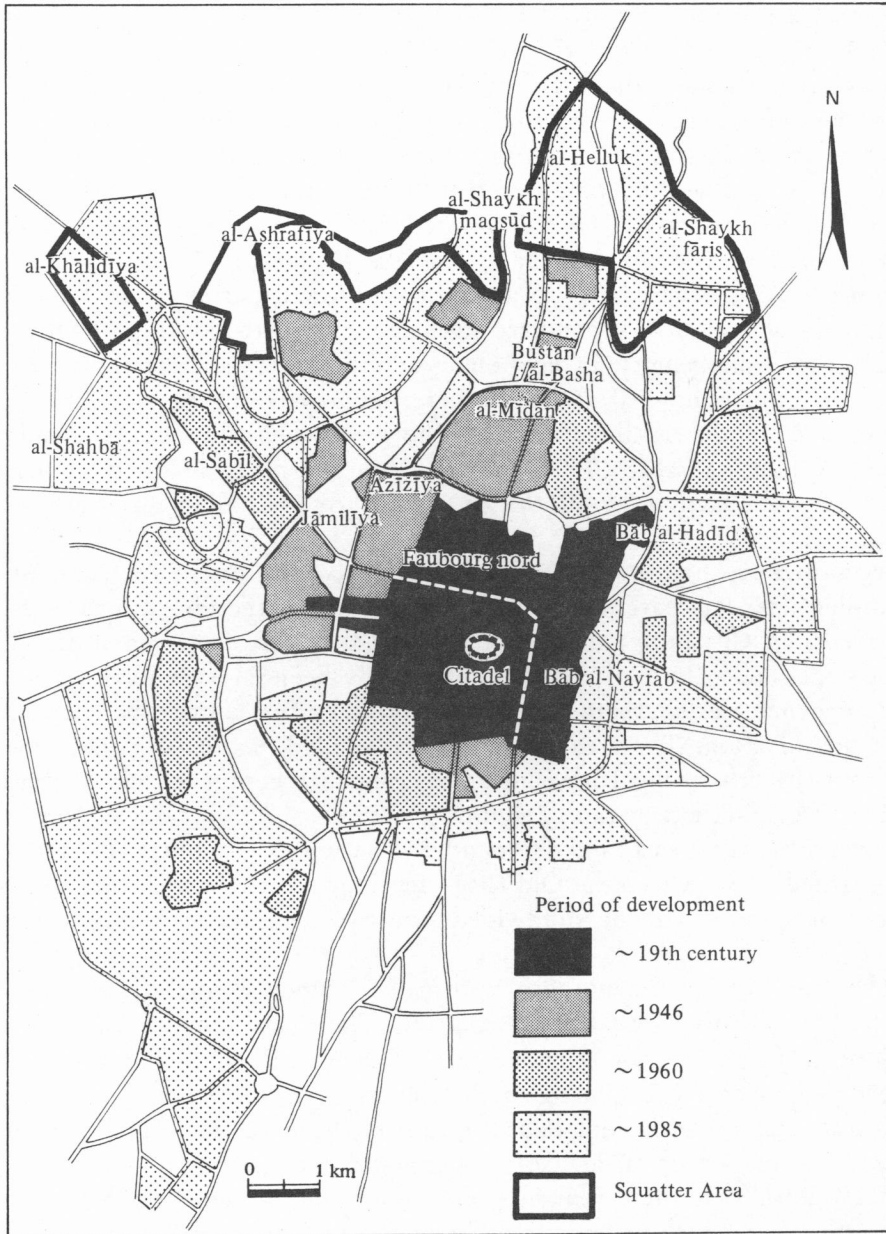
Source: Hamide, A-R. (1959): *La vie d'Alep,* Université de Paris, p. 75, David, J-C. (1980): *op. cit.*

Figure 3   Expansion of Aleppo

western outskirts of the *faubourg nord* in the 18th and 19th centuries, as wealthy Christian and foreign inhabitants built 2 and 3 story villas in a grid-like planned area. This first extension to the west defined the direction of further development outward from the *faubourg nord*. Between the early 20th century and Independence in 1946, the north-western environs became established as the new center for administration and economic activities, and most government offices, trading companies, hotels, and cultural centers are still located in this area. As the Christian relocated their residences from the *faubourg nord* outward to the new settlements in al-'Azīzīya and al-Jamīlīya, the *faubourg nord* was gradually taken over by the Muslims who had previously resided inside the walls. And as a consequence, the former Christian area has recently come to be regarded as a low-income housing area for urban Muslims. Yet, with its adequate standard of living and legality of land tenure, it should be distinguished from inner city slums in other countries.

In the 1920s, the first noticeable influx of population settled in the northern peripheries. They were Armenian refugees who left Turkey after the genocide there in 1915 and 1916. By the end of the 1920s, more than 150,000 Armenian refugees had arrived in Aleppo. At first, they lived in scattered monasteries and caravansarays in the Old City, but soon, with the support of several Syrian and foreign organizations and a number of the individuals, they began constructing makeshift accommodations in the refugee camps in al-Mīdān and Bustān al-bāshā districts. In the 1930s, they gradually improved their shanty houses in the camps, and also constructed several new settlements on the northern hillsides: Dawdīya (now al-Ashrafīya), Jabal al-sayyda (now al-Shaykh maqsūd), and al-Helluk. Of these, the Armenians particularly favored the former two areas, the names of which reflect their Christian orientation. The name Dawdīya comes from David, and Jabal al-sayyda from Mt. St. Maria.

The next stage of urbanization has occurred between Independence and the 1960s, and it progressed rather gradually from the existing built-up areas outward in all directions. The areas newly developed in this period can be classified according to economic status. The north and north-westwards expansion consisted of urban middle to upper classes, especially the westward extension to both al-Sabīl and al-Shahbā', the inhabitants of which are at the highest income level. On the other hand, low-income housing areas have tended to be scattered in the east-, south-, and south-westward directions.

The period between Independence and the end of 1950s was politically unstable in Syria because of a chain of factional infightings. In fact, it should be noted that the end of the 1950s was a turning point, when political leadership shifted from the indiginous elite to such newly ascendant groups as military officers, urban middle class and young intellectuals. In 1958, the United Arab Republic established under Nasser's presidency, and its socialist

policy certainly encouraged the urban poor and dispossessed peasants, but at the same time, it adversely affected economic activities in the private sector throughout the country. This fragile Union dissolved in 1961, and the even more socialistic Ba'thists rose to political power in the 8 March Revolution in 1963. In the following decade, a series of socialist reforms were carried out, including nationalization of the big private enterprises, confiscation of large estates, and restriction on financial and commercial activities by individuals. As a result, the urban economy of Aleppo, which had been almost solely sustained by private economic activities both in trading and indiginous manufacture fell into serious stagnation. As a matter of fact, the moderate scale of urbanization in this period is a reflection of this stagnant situation of the urban economy.

In contrast, from the 1970s and onward, under the regime of President Ḥafiz al-Asad who assumed office in 1971, government economic policies shifted to some extent toward liberalization. Asad modified the former socialist reforms and eased restrictions, particularly on private initiative in the commercial sector, as well as adopting positive measures for industrialization on a national scale. His policies have been carried out to a considerable extent, and by the end of the 1970s, he had succeeded in establishing a stable state which was regarded as an influential in Middle Eastern political affairs.

Economic growth in the 1970s was accompanied by an acceleration in rural-to-urban migration, as the urban-rural dichotomy became salient in comparisons of income levels, educational opportunities, and infrastructure. As is indicated in Figure 3, the most remarkable example of recent urbanization can be seen on a chain of hillsides north of the city. The settlements stretch from west to east: al-Khālidīya, al-Ashrafīya, al-Shaykh maqsūd, al-Helluk, and al-Shaykh fāris. Among them, al-Khālidīya differs from the other settlements, in that its inhabitants are mostly Arab Muslim villagers from the northern and western provinces, while the other settlements are populated to a considerable extent by Kurdish ex-peasants who in-migrated from 'Afrīn region in the northern district adjacent to the Syro-Turkish border.

The in-migration of the Kurds to these hills started in the mid-1960s. The initial Kurdish settlers in Aleppo had rented rooms either in the inner city or in the low-income housing area surrounding the Old City, so as to be close to job opportunities. However, in general, they tended to change their residence frequently due to high rent, insufficient space for their big families, and a possibly more important factor—that the Kurds could not adapt themselves to their urban Aleppean neighbors. After several steps, these migrants finally found satisfactory residential sites on the northern slopes of the city. As already mentioned, these hills were first developed by the Armenians in the 1930s. However, from the 1960s, the Armenians began to relocate down to the foot of the hills, in the Mīdān-Sulaymanīya district, which was another con-

centration of Armenian residents. In fact, this district is located on the site of the first Armenian refugee camp in the city. The Armenians have improved their socio-economic status with the strong backing of their religio-ethnic community, and to create their own settlement in the memorable Mīdān-Sulaymanīya is, undoubtedly, their final goal.

After the Armenians left, the Kurds took over their residences. Yet it should be noted that their succession to occupancy was not the "invasion" which can often be seen in the inner city slums of developed countries. The Kurdish migrants bought their land and houses with normal sales contracts, although they mostly did not wish to acquire the legal title and consequent responsibility to pay taxes for either the land or the houses. The largest-scale squatter settlements formed in the northern hill districts with the immense influx of Kurdish villagers from the 'Afrīn region. Since the mid-1970s, newly arrived Kurdish villagers settled directly on the four hillsides, and by 1986 the squatter area was almost continuous and unbroken from the west to the east. According to the latest census in 1981, the population in the four settlements was 91,394, about 10 percent of the total population of Aleppo City. In making residential choices, it should be noted that two factors were important to the Kurds: firstly, the possibility of forming a homogeneous community with ethnic and tribal affinities, and secondly, the preference for hillsides sites because of the topographical similarity to their native villages.

While al-Khālidīya settlement also developed particularly in the 1970s, it differs from the other northern hill settlements in its divergent path of development as well as in its distinctive social structure. In the following section, the process of settlement formation by rural-to-urban drift, yet not structured along ethnic or religious lines, will be discussed in detail, based on a case study of al-Khālidīya.

III. Al-Khālidīya; Development of An Urban Periphery Settlement

1. General Description of the Study Area

According to the 1981 census the population of al-Khālidīya was 8,300, but in 1986, based on reliable information from a real estate agent, it was estimated to be more than 12,000. Squatter housing accounted for over 90 percent of all the households, while the remainder had legal title to property which was located in the public housing areas for the low-income workers.

Al-Khālidīya is located at the north-western extremity of the built-up area of Aleppo and completely covers a hill, the top of which is about 40 meters higher than the city center. And as was previously mentioned, the social structure is quite distinct from that of the Kurdish villages in the northern hill districts. Of the total population, Arab Muslims account for 70 percent, and the remaining 30 percent are Kurds who have rented accommodations since

the mid-1970s. The Arab Muslim residents of al-Khālidīya came from four villages — Bellīrmūn, Minnagh, and 'Injāra in Aleppo Muḥāfaẓa, and Killī Village in Idlib Muḥāfaẓa (Figure 4), and they represent respectively 41, 8, 4, and 17 percent of the total population.

The inhabitants are most employed as unskilled laborers in the manufacturing industries, and whose average monthly salary is estimated to the 1,200-1,500 Syrian pounds. In addition, they may earn an additional 1,000 Syrian pounds or so with various part-time jobs. The source of this miscellaneous revenue is really various. For instance, they work as taxi drivers, waiters in restarurants, hawkers, manual laborers for public works, and brokers for every purpose. With this total income, the inhabitants of al-Khālidīya attain an adequate standard of living. In 1986, several durable consumer goods such as refrigerators, television-sets, and electric fans were present in almost all the houses, although, some basic public services such as sewage facilities are not yet available. In the past thirty years, land value has increased remarkably, from
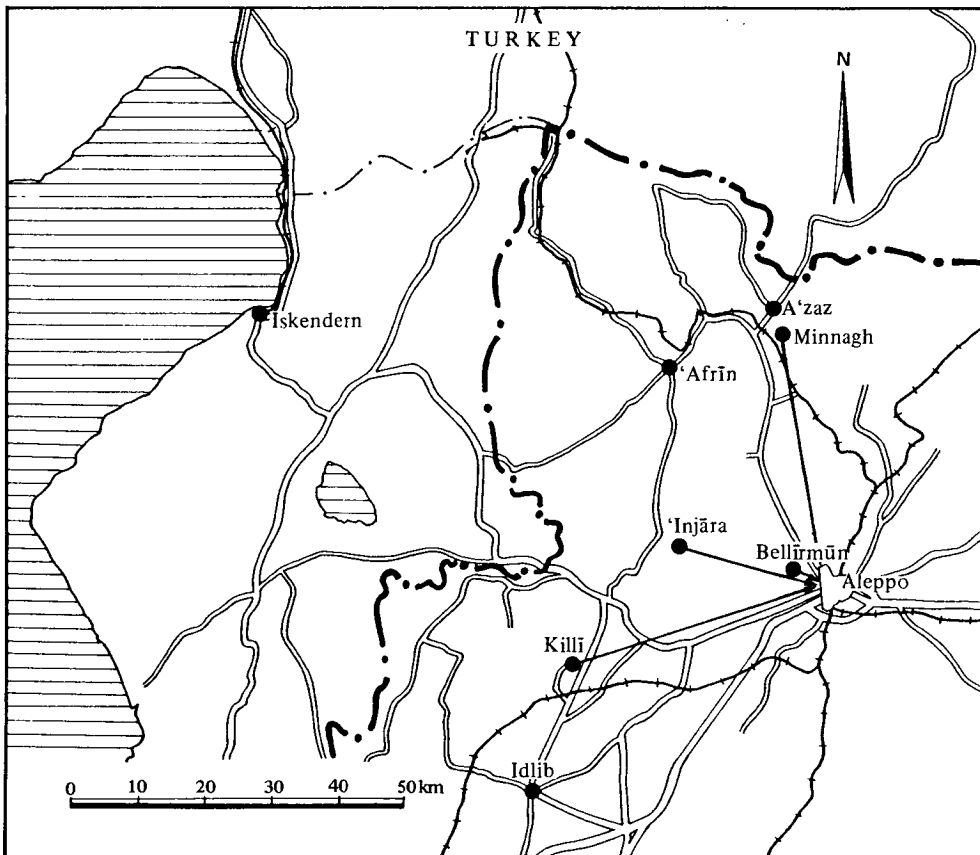

Figure 4   Migration Flow to al-Khālidīya

1-3 Syrian pounds per square meter in 1955 to 1,000-3,000 Syrian pounds in 1986. But despite of this high rate of increase, land value is till comparable to that in other residential areas of Aleppo.

The process of urbanization in al-Khālidīya can be divided into three developmental stages each with distinct socio-economic characteristics; (I) The first stage of initial development: from 1953-1960, (II) The second stage of moderate agglomeration of the rural population: from 1960-1975, (III) The latest stage of rapid increase in population and intervention of municipal authorities to inhibit unplanned scattering of the squatter area: from 1975. Squatter housing has continued to spread in the last five years from the end of 1970s to the early 1980s.

While it will be discussed in greater detail in the next section later, the term urbanization needs some explication in the context of al-Khālidīya. Socio-cultural assimilation to the traditional Aleppeans' urban life did not accompany urbanization in al-Khālidīya. Accordingly, the term should be understood only to refer to the emergence there of squatter housing and the fact that inhabitants are mostly employed in non-agricultural work.

2. Initial Development of Industrial Zone and Residential Area

Prior to the early 1950s, the site of al-Khālidīya was a quarry for building materials, and it was completely empty of settlements. The first stage of development in al-Khālidīya started in the early 1950s with the construction of several spinning and textile factories on a northern hilltop (Figure 5). These factories were the first to begin operation after Independence, and thus, they were regarded as symbolic of the new industrialization at the dawn of the post-war period. The labor force, at that time, came mostly from the urban low-income class which resided in the inner city of Aleppo; however, about the mid-1950s, some ex-peasant workers from Bellīrmūn, Killī, and 'Injāra villages were employed at these factories.

Because workers' residences were not provided, these villagers built brick-block houses and settled on the southern slopes of the hills without any legal title to the land or houses, although they did buy their land from private owners at the rate of 1-3 Syrian pounds per square meter. The primary settlements are shown in Figure 5, and as can be seen in it, the villagers of Bellīrmūn were the first to settle in al-Khālidīya in 1956, followed by successive waves of migrants from the other villages. It should be noted that at this first stage of urbanization, the factories acted as magnets pulling in the rural population. The development of al-Khālidīya was not "spontaneous", and for this reason, the term "spontaneous settlement" is cautiously avoided in this study, although it is often used interchangeably with "squatter settlement" or "low-income housing".

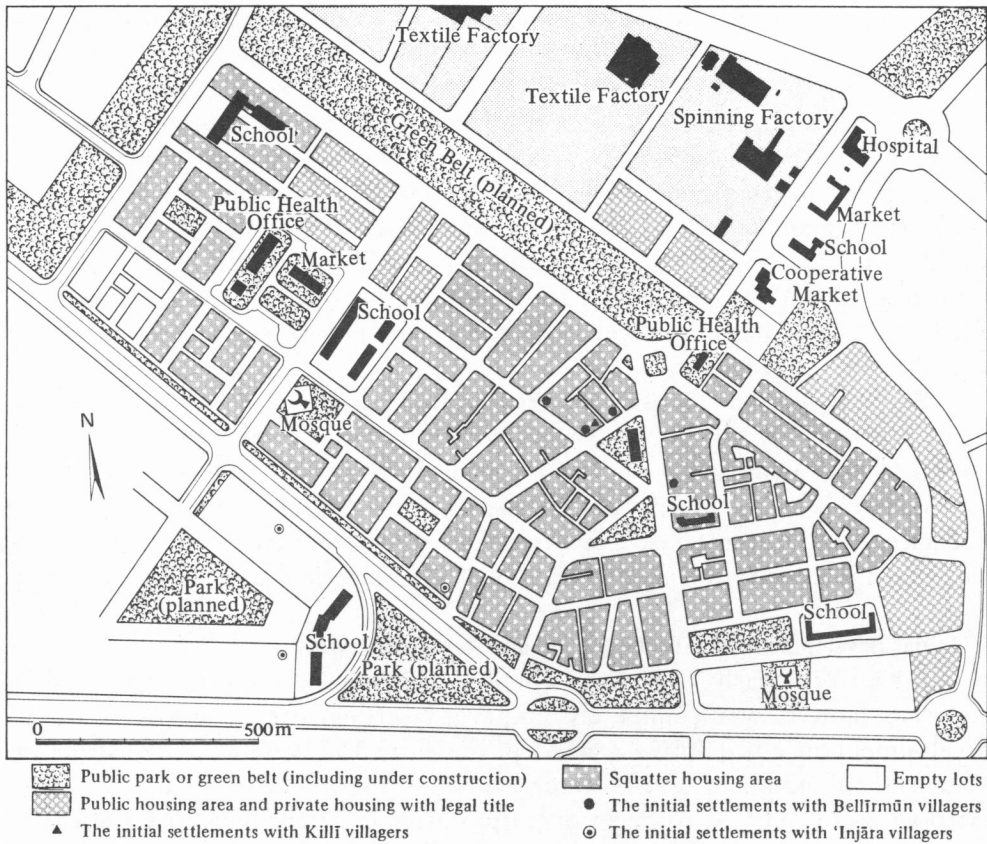Thus, this urban periphery settlement has contained both a planned

Figure 5 Present Feature of al-Khālidīya

industrial zone and a squatter housing area from the first phase of its develop-
ment. A map drawn in 1953 (Figure 6) illustrates the curious situation of
development in this area. It shows a layout of roads in a grid-like pattern
stretching from the south-east to the north-west in a semi-radial pattern, but
only half of them were ever built. As far as this plan is concerned, al-Khālidīya
should have been a new residential district for workers adjacent to the factories
for their convenience. It is not clear why this layout never materialized.
According to the residents, although the municipal government of Aleppo
drew up this plan, it never carried out any active measures to purchase land or
build low-cost housing because of financial problems until the end of the
1970s.

3. Formation of a Rural-oriented Community and Moderate Development
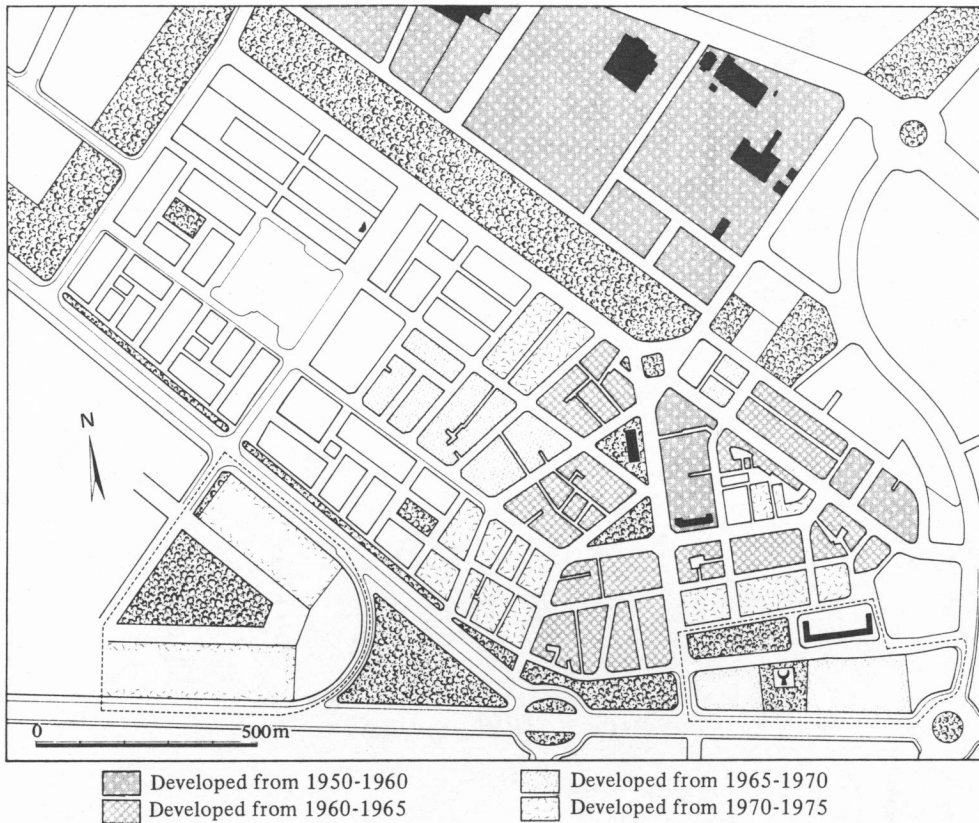
In the second stage of development between the early 1960s and the mid-
1970s, the aggregation of rural-oriented population advanced gradually but
continuously (Figure 7). As the labor requirements of the factories in al-

Existing Streets in 1953   ⎯ ⎯ ⎯ ⎯ ⎯ Planned Streets in 1953   Existing Streets in 1986
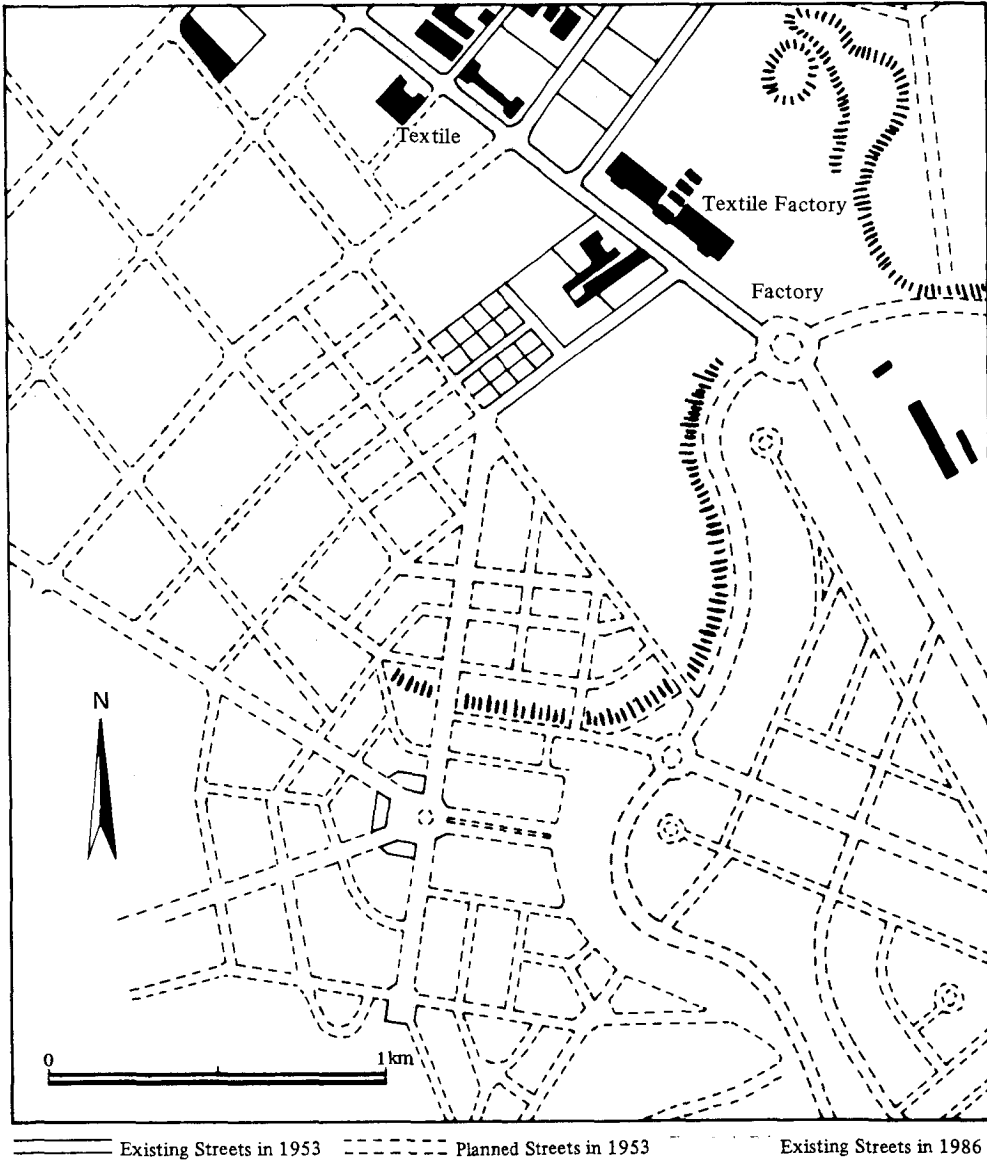
Source: The Municipality of Aleppo

Figure 6   Al-Khālidīya in the Early 1950s

Khālidīya were limited to under two hundred persons, new arrivals were mostly employed in other factories as unskilled laborers. At this stage, the squatter settlements were scattered on the hillside, but despite the lack of authorized planning, the spatial pattern they created was rather well-ordered. This seems to be a result of well-organized selling of the land by the original private

Developed from 1950-1960   Developed from 1965-1970
Developed from 1960-1965   Developed from 1970-1975

Figure 7   Development of al-Khālidīya

owners, and at the same time, of the initiative for settlement formation that some dominant families took. Similar grid-like plans can be seen in other squatter housing areas on the northern hills populated by the Kurds. In any case, in al-Khālidīya, it should be noted that the illegality of land tenure did not cause a haphazard spreading of the squatter housing.[6]

As the population increased, newcomers could not find enough space to live near people from the same villages, therefore they had two choices if they were to preserve the firm cohesion of their home communities: to build their own residential block apart from the existing settlements as the people from 'Injāra Village did, or to live close to people from other villages, but only on nodding terms with them. As previously noted, except fot the Kurdish population, all the residents of al-Khālidīya are Arab Muslims. However, they do not identify themselves according to religion or ethnicity but rather according to tribe which firmly attaches to their native villages.

Correlation between the people from Bellīrmūn and 'Injāra exemplifies

6   In this respect, another case study should be made of the formation of squatter areas on government land and common land named *mushā‘* in Arabic.

characteristics of the social relations among the rural-oriented inhabitants. There was a long-standing quarrel between two predominant families fom the two villages. The reason for this quarrel is not clear but it may have been some problem concerning the honor of the two families. This trouble was well known by the new comers from both villages, and consequently, unfriendly attitudes toward people from the other village were kept alive not only by those families but by all the new arrivals. As this relates to community formation, it should be stressed that the newcomers could preserve their sense of identity by keeping up this unpleasant atmosphere. Thus, a small quarrel at the family level contributed to maintain firm kinship ties among settlers from the same native places. On the other hand, the attitude of inhabitants from other villages was one of feigned unconcern. The people from Bellīrmūn Village were the initial settlers there, and accounted for 60 percent of the Arab Muslim inhabitants. Even those who came from Killī Village, the second largest community, represented only 24 percent of the Arab Muslims. Therefore, the smaller communities assumed somewhat secondary status to the major com-
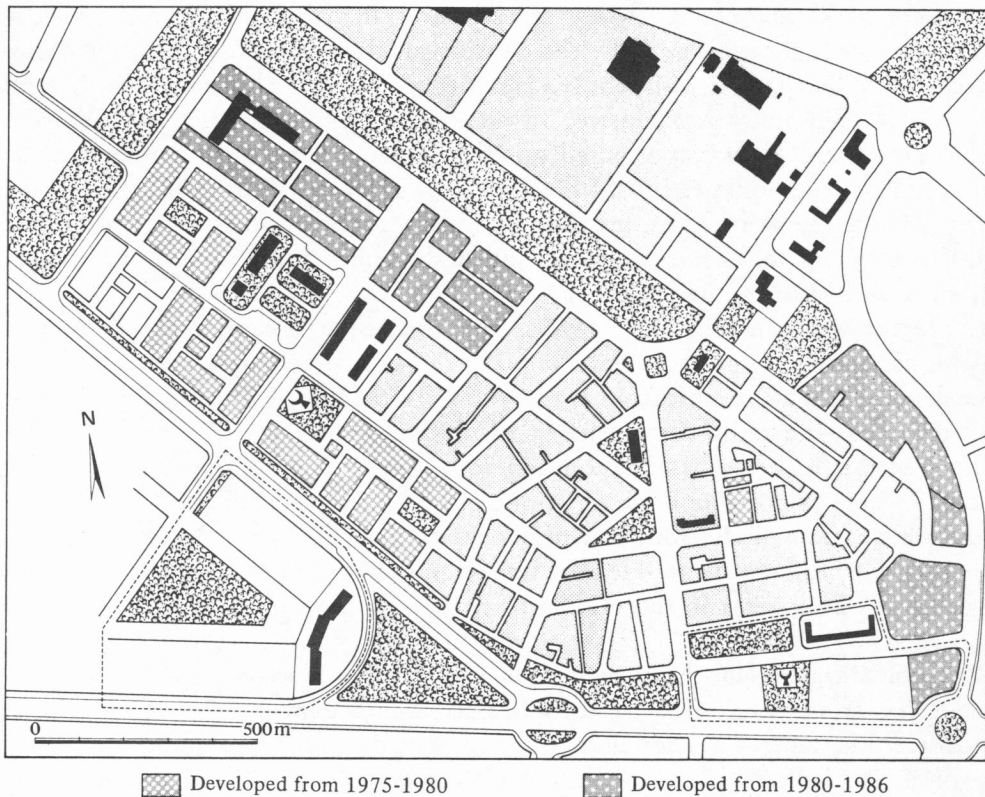

Developed from 1975-1980   Developed from 1980-1986

Figure 8   Development of al-Khālidīya between 1975 and 1986

munity which consisted of the people from Bellīrmūn, for instance in choos-
ing the housing sites.

In the second stage of urbanization, thus resistant to assimilation, al-
Khālidīya paradoxically displayed a distinctive rurality in its social structure.
In addition to this, it is important that al-Khālidīya became a transit point for
the rural villagers who had business in the city. They are heartily welcomed by
their relatives in exactly the same manner as they would be in their own
villages, and they stay one or two nights. Usually, the villagers prefer their
relatives' houses to hotels in the Western style. This function clearly contri-
butes to maintain the "rural-oriented" social characteristics of the community
for al-Khālidīya dwellers. Similar functions are often found in settlements on
the urban periphery. Another example is Bāb al-Nayrab settlement on the
eastern periphery of the walled city which has also maintained itself as an
exclusive community, membership of which has been limited to nomads and
livestock merchants from the eastern desert region.

With respect to its economic structure, al-Khālidīya should be identified
as an urban settlement, for the inhabitants were most employed as unskilled
workers in the manufacturing sector. However, the rural quality of the society
has been strongly reinforced by the continuous flow of visitors from the native
villages. By Aleppeans, al-Khālidīya is regarded as a typical ruralized settlement
in which community is exclusive. In fact, in the more than two decades from
the mid-1950s, no urban-oriented population moved there from Aleppo City,
nor did any inhabitants of al-Khālidīya ever relocate their residences to the
city. There seems to be an invisible boundary between other urban areas and
al-Khālidīya in the sense that socio-cultural assimilation to the urban society
has not yet occurred in the latter.

Meanwhile, in the late 1960s, the municipal government of Aleppo
demonstrated its power to intervene in the unplanned development of this
settlement when it confiscated land owned by the Jews. The confiscated area
is located at the south-eastern fringe of al-Khālidīya (Figure 7). However, this
intervention was not based upon any long-range planning ideas; it should be
seen as one of the economic sanctions placed on Jews after the Israeli attack
and occupation of the southern provinces of Syria in 1967. In fact, as noted
in Figure 8, the confiscated lot has remained undeveloped except for a mosque
which was built right in the middle of it.

4. Recent Migratory Movements and the Municipal Housing Program

The latest stage of urbanization started in the mid-1970s in a series of
positive measures for economic development implemented under the Asad
regime. Particularly between the late 1970s and the early 1980s, the migratory
movements of rural populations accelerated. As shown in Figure 8, about half
of the existing residential area of al-Khālidīya, which includes some public

housing, was developed in this period. The development of this stage should be divided into two distinct phases: firstly, as mentioned above, the rapid expansion of the squatter housing area and secondly, the execution of urban planning such as construction of the paved roads and public housing for low-income inhabitants.

Table 3. Labor Force Structure by Sectors and Its Change, 1971 to 1979 (%)

Sector	1971	1973	1975	1977	1979
Agriculture, forestry, hunting, fishing	56.2	50.8	49.7	37.7	31.8
Mining	0.1	0.9	0.7	0.4	—
Manufacturing	1.2	9.8	11.5	13.3	15.6
Electricity, gas, water	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.9	1.5
Building, construction	4.7	5.6	7.0	8.9	13.7
Wholesale, retail trade, restaurants and hotels	9.0	9.4	10.3	10.2	10.2
Transport and communications	3.0	4.0	4.2	6.0	4.5
Finance, insurance, real estate	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.7	1.0
Social and personal services	1.6	16.0	12.8	19.0	19.5
Miscellaneous	3.3	2.4	2.5	2.9	2.2

Source: Firro, K. (1986): The Syrian Economy under the Assad Regime, in Ma'oz, M. & Yaniv, A. (ed.), *Syria under Assad,* Croom Helm, London, pp. 42.

The increase of the rural exodus in this period can be explained in both economic and political terms. The economic factor was the real growth of the Syrian economy in the first half of the 1970s. In spite of the immense expenses for the Syro-Israeli war in 1973 which was estimated to have cost over 1 billion US dollars, Syria achieved a high rate of economic growth. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, Syria's annual growth rate in GDP from 1973 to 1976 averaged 12.9 percent, while it has averaged 5.7 percent from 1965 to 1973.[7] Firro (1986) noted three major factors which contributing to this economic growth: first, President Asad's policies for economic revitalization of private enterprise and reinforcement of the links with Western economies, which were carried out in the third five-year plan (1971-75); second, the large amount of financial aid from Arab countries for economic reconstruction after the 1973 War; and third, particularly between 1973 and 1976, the vast increase in oil production and export.[8]

---

[7] Central Bureau of Statitics (1965-1975): Statistical Abstract.
[8] Firro, K. (1986): The Syrian Economy under the Assad Regime, in Ma'oz, M. & Yaniv, A. (ed.) *Syria under Assad,* Croom Helm, London, pp. 44-45.

This economic growth caused a change in the distribution of the Syrian labor force by economic sectors: a great decrease in the agricultural sector, and a corresponding increase in the manufacturing, building, and service sectors (Table 3). Encouragement of the private sectors particularly contributed to increasing migration to Aleppo, where new arrivals were employed not only in the manufacturing sector, but in the building and service sectors as well. Between the late 1970s and the early 1980s, the rural economies of the four villages from which villagers migrated to al-Khālidīya were not so critical as to accelerate an exodus movement. However, the income divergence between Aleppo City and the villages certainly grew as the demand for labor overwhelmingly exceeded the supply in the city. Accordingly, the new arrivals to al-Khālidīya in this period did not have the homogeneity in their jobs by economic sector that the initial settlers had.

During the subsequent decade from 1975 to 1985, the Syrian economy faced serious problems, and by the early 1980s, the balance of payments had critically deteriorated. The continuous and enormous military expenses for keeping a military presence in Lebanon obliged the Syrian government to reduce investment in the industrial sector. And the fall in world oil prices led to a serious deficit in the balance of payments. This critical situation of the Syrian economy did not alleviate the rural-urban income divergence, or contribute to reduce migratory movement from the villages. In fact, several residents mentioned that in-migration to al-Khālidīya had increased rapidly over the last decade despite the decline of the Syrian economy. This paradoxical trend can best be explained in political terms.

In contrast with the economic factors, the political factors which encouraged cityward migration were somewhat ambiguous. Between the late 1970s and the early 1980s, uprisings of the Muslim Brotherhood frequently occurred in Aleppo as well as in Ḥama, the fourth largest city. The first riot of the Muslim Brotherhood in Aleppo occurred on June 16, 1979, when more than thirty army cadets at the Aleppo artillery school were killed by Brotherhood members.[9] In March 1980, more than ten thousand infantrymen advanced into Aleppo City to suppress the rioters. At the same time, the government replaced the Mayor and members of the Branch Command of the Ba'th Party in Aleppo. As a result, the municipal administration of Aleppo came under the control of the Ministry of the Interior.

This political unrest directly influenced urban policy and planning, and accordingly, the municipal government immediately implemented some sweeping projects in several settlements regarded as bases of the Muslim Brotherhood or of weapons suppliers. For example, the Bāb al-Nayrab settlement, known to be the center for a large-scale smuggling organization, was almost completely

---

9 *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, Vol. 3, 1978-1979, Holmes & Meier, 1980, New York, p. 803.

destroyed under the pretext of urban renewal.[10] The areas planned for renewal were mostly located in the Old City and populated by conservative Sunnis, for the Muslim Brotherhood movement was mainly supported by these conservative urban Sunnis.

At the same time, it was widely rumored in al-Khālidīya that the municipal authorities could not check on titles of land or houses, because the responsible section was too busy with the very urgent political matters mentioned above. In fact, the municipality had already completed the cadastral maps of al-Khālidīya by this time, and was prepared to impose a real-estate tax. But it was also true that the municipality had not enough staff or time to implement this immediately. This information was rapidly passed back to the native villages, and gave impetus to the villagers' migratory movement, with the consequence that chain migration toward al-Khālidīya was accelerated in the early 1980s. Similar rumors were spreading in the other squatter areas such as al-Ashrafīya, al-Shaykh maqsūd, and al-Shaykh fāris. Here also, squatter housing expanded remarkably between 1980 and 1985.

Shortly after the subjugation of the uprisings, the municipality set about urban planning in the squatter housing areas, particularly to provide improved public services such as running water, paved roads, and electricity. Such upgrading projects were carried out throughout the city, and the increase in public investment had the effect of revitalizing the local economy of Aleppo after a decade of stagnation. These attempts should be perceived more as a part of state policies for economics revitalization, and less as aimed at enforcement of administration by the Ministry of the Interior.

In al-Khālidīya, the paved streets and traffic circles shown in Figure 8 were constructed in the early 1980s as was the public investment. Furthermore, for the first time, the municipal authorities attempted to restrict further expansion of the squatter housing area. The triangular area at the southwestern part of al-Khālidīya was formerly populated by migrants from 'Injara Village, but from 1980 to 1983 the municipality destroyed their squatter housing and planned to build public housing there for low-income residents. The residents of that area, however, were unwilling to live in small-sized apartments, and sought out places to live on the eastern periphery of the Old City, adjacent to Bāb al-Nayrab where some of their relatives were engaged as masons. It is frequently observed that squatters do not want to reside in public low-income housing but prefer to move to another place where they can maintain their regional communities. By the end of 1986, this planned area for public housing was still almost empty, and extension of the squatter housing area into it was blocked by the paved street which stretched from the central rotary to

---

10   As previously noted, Bād al-Nayrab was populated by livestock merchants whose trading network spread from Turkey to the Gulf countries. It is not suprising that these merchants were engaged in smuggling all kinds of contraband goods such as drugs and weapons.

the north-west.

In recent years, municipal housing programs for the squatter settlements have appeared to have two goals: firstly, to restrict further scattering; and secondly, to accept *de facto* settlement, and try to impose tax on the land and houses. The measure undertaken by the municipality to restrict sprawling was to encompass the squatter housing area with certain solid barriers such as paved streets and green belts (Figure 6). On the positive side, the municipality allocated a budget to build several public facilities such as elementary schools, a public health center, and a cooperative market. By the early 1980s, when all the basic urban services except for sewage facilities had been made available in most of the squatter housing areas, the taxation office was able to begin persuading the inhabitants to pay real-estate taxes in exchange for legal title to land and houses. The series of public investment projects and the offer of security of tenure certainly encouraged the inhabitants to accept the municipal programs, but they would not have if the municipality itself had not adapted to the realities of the *status quo* of the squatter housing area.

IV. Additional Remarks on Urban Policy and its Implications

From the initial development in the early 1950s and onward, the municipal or government authorities intervened three times in the otherwise unplanned expansion of al-Khālidīya. The first time was not exactly intervention, but was certainly planning without recognition of the realities. As previously noted, in the early 1950s, the municipality already had made a layout of a road plan, although for the most part it was never implemented. The second intervention in the late 1960s was the confiscation of land owned by Jews. This was certainly carried out to the extent that the land was bulldozed. However, due to lack of concrete plans, the land has not yet been utilized for any building purposes. Thirdly and more significantly, beginning in the 1980s, the municipality commenced to regularize the existing squatter housing and to bring it under the control of the planning authorities. This last was virtually the first attempt to stop the unplanned scattering of squatter housing.

The story of the development of al-Khālidīya suggests that the municipality attained a new residential area at a minimal cost, because it was achieved to a considerable extent by individuals acting independently. Indeed, the government did play a major role, at least, in blocking the haphazard extension of the squatter housing area. And it is impressive that this program was completed by means of a very small-scale and short-term public investment. However, the development path of al-Khālidīya should be regarded as an exceptional case, for the upgrading programs were very timely, and on the residents' side, it was acceptable in the sense that this project improved the

infrastructure and assured legal status to squatter housing. In fact, this municipal housing program was not even considered until a late stage of development, and was only coincidentally executed in connection with national economic revitalization plans.

Actually, inferior squatter housing can frequently be seen in the other northern hill districts. For instance, in al-Ashrafīya and al-Shaykh maqsūd, the squatter area has been widely extended in the last five years with the immense influx of Kurdish migration from 'Afrīn region. As late as the end of the 1970s, Kurdish settlers built their brick-block houses in the orderly squared up lots which landowners had allocated. But the new arrivals, particularly those in very low-income groups, could not find housing sites in the already built-up areas. Their residences, therefore, had to be located outward toward less developed sites where running water and electricity was rarely available. In these areas, no municipal housing projects have been implemented. With an ever-increasing population, the planning authorities cannot even imagine what urban planning might be desirable.

In contrast with these Kurdish settlements, al-Khālidīya is a fairly well-ordered squatter area, although this attribution may be somewhat paradoxical. The greatest contrasts between al-Khālidīya and the Kurdish settlements can be seen in the scale of migratory movement which was very small into al-Khālidīya, and in income divergence which was also relatively small there. Concerning the scale of migration, it should be noted that the Kurds have a much larger hinterland in the northern province which stretches all the way to the Syro-Turkish boundary. And as for income divergence, this is partially affected by the size of the original rural community, and the Kurdish society consists of a vast number of dispossessed peasants. While the northern province itself is one of the most fertile and wealthy agricultural regions in Syria, wide income differentials still exist because of inequality in the distribution of land ownership.

The case study of al-Khālidīya suggests that certain social factors contributed significantly to the residents' own efforts to improve this settlement. As previously noted, most of the inhabitants are ex-peasant workers from different native villages. Further, each group from the same village consists of several tribes or big families ('ā'ila in Arabic), and firm kinship ties have been maintained. Therefore, mutual aid is available in every facet of their social life. In fact, wealthy families privately provide urban facilities such as water, electricity and job opportunities for new arrivals. In the case of electricity, newcomers illegally wire their houses for electricity from a neibhboring house which is wealthy enough to sign a contract with the Public Organization for Electricity Supply, and they pay a share of the bill. As for domestic water, in areas where running water connections have not been installed, low-income dwellers usually ask to share pumped-up water with

some wealthy family to avoid the high installation and running costs for a motorized pump. With respect to employment, the predominant families usually provide job opportunities for their newly arrived relatives. Through such kinds of socio-economic assistance, each group with the same regional origin has worked to improve its economic status in the new residential area of al-Khālidīya. In addition, an underlying tension among the different groups also has contributed to upgrade their living standards competitively, particularly in seeking urban amenities.

Mutual help or assistance to group members based upon the cohesion of the social group is common in Syria as in other Middle Eastern countries. Such cohesion is closely related to the Islamic value system, in that acts of social justice are required as part of the practice of Islam. In fact, for Muslims, persons in the higher economic strata have a duty to narrow the social welfare differentials through financial assistance to those in the lower strata, and offering this kind of aid is considered one of the most important virtues in Islam. However, it should be stressed that the beneficiaries of the aid are usually members of the same family ('ā'ila) or the same clan, particularly in rural communities. In other words, priority is given to a specified social group the solidarity of which needs to be strengthened. At least in the formation phase of a new settlement, it appears that the social group consisting of people from the same village is the principal unit with which the inhabitants identified.

While the planning authorities of Aleppo did not set about any effective housing projects until the end of the 1970s, they were probably keeping watch on the path of development in al-Khālidīya. And, to the extent that the inhabitants were not involved in any political movements, the municipal authorities left this newly built-up area to its own development. The destruction of Bāb al-Nayrab in the early 1980s exemplified how municipal or state urban policies might be realized. In this regard, further study of the Kurdish squatter housing areas is needed, where contradictions due to wide income divergence are more serious than those observable in al-Khālidīya.