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Sectarian Identity and Reconciliation in Post-Conflict Syria: Survey Research among Syrian Migrants

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Abstract. The conflict in Syrian sectarianized promptly. To have a factual base for intensifying sectarianism, a survey research was conducted with Syrian migrants. Key insights were utilized in the evaluation of research findings in terms of persistence of sectarianism, sectarian identity, sectarian leadership, and reconciliation in the post-conflict Syria. However, an emphasis on sectarianism in the functioning of state or in the society denies the essence of resolution and reconciliation. In the future of Syria, the effective peace settlements and reconciliation will need to diminish the divisive role of sectarianism to prevent a cycle of violence. Constructivist approach may offer insights.

Keywords*: sectarian identity, Syrian migrants, post-conflict Syria, reconciliation, constructivism*

Introduction

The domestic and international politics of the Middle East region are unique in terms of the power of identity. The identity is two-sided, it provides cooperation within the group but also it is the source of the conflict and the locomotive behind the mobilization and opposition movements. Especially religious and sectarian identities are powerful source of identity in the region. This type of identities or membership to religious organizations may offer non-religious material or social benefits including economic opportunities, educational resources or psychological support. In addition to material gains, individual religious identification may result in enhanced group solidarity and collective identification.

In sectarian societies, most of the ruling class may not be sectarian nor even religious. The sects may be easily instrumentalized through politics to remain power. The sectarian identity may become the way of accessing political representation, economic benefits or positions in the army and bureaucracy.

The Syrian society divided along religious and sectarian lines and sectarian identities existed from the beginning of Syrian history. The Assad regime tried to

incorporate cross sectarian and cross class coalitions. Sectarian differences and grievances did not turn into a civil war despite of strong awareness of them. Besides, at the beginning of the conflict the main mobilizer were not ancient and unchanging sectarian hatreds, instead ideological, nonsectarian, sub-state, class and economic motivations prevailed. However, the conflict quickly became sectarianized and the existing sectarian identities are mobilized both by the regime and opponents into a violent civil war. The regime's violent response to opponent groups, manipulation of sectarian identity both by the regime and opponents, external powers' manipulation and intervention were all deepened the intensity of sectarianism. Since sectarianism had been implanted in Syrian society long time before the conflict, it was a quick response under the challenging circumstances of uprisings. Even at the beginning of the uprisings, we admit that incidents were not sectarian, but now sectarian identities have a pivotal role in the conflict. Sectarianism in the country seems highly possible to persist in the foreseeable future.

While the regime started to take control of the territories of opposing groups with the help of external powers, an important question comes into mind whether it is possible to restore such a polarized society along sectarian lines or by different solutions. Sectarian preferences of both the parties to the conflict, migrants and exile communities will likely remain as default. Besides, Syrian exile communities have to be taken into consideration to build up new political parties and movements after the violence ends. That is why survey research designed to understand the views of migrants and exile communities who may have a contribution to construct post-conflict order in Syria. The survey research with Syrian migrants in Turkey and Turkish-Syrian border shows us that the emphasis on sects, sectarian leadership, discourse of religion are the most significant forms of expression of identity. According to the results of the research, sectarian identity cannot be eliminated from consideration in the post-conflict Syria. This type of strong attachment may undermine all peace initiatives and reconciliation among groups if it is not handled precisely. The regime's discourse of reconciliation is exclusionary on the ground of loyal and disloyal citizens (Abboud: 2020). This type of discourse and a peace settlement add a new split to the existing sectarian polarization in the society.

In post-conflict Syria, resolution and reconciliation processes are better to consider construction of new identities in the very part of the processes themselves. It would be idealistic that the construction of new identities could be achieved. Nevertheless, religious, and sectarian attachment in politics is not seen as the core

element of democratic political culture and reconciliation and construction of new identities instead of exclusionary identities are necessary part of processes to prevent a future conflict.

The field research based on the interview schedule, which we will explain in detail below shows that the emphasis on religious identities is an omnipresent phenomenon. However, religious attachment is not seen as the pivotal component of democratic political culture. This is the sign of the mismatch between democratic discourses produced by the al-Assad regime and the citizens understanding of the very ideal of democracy. Sectarian identities had been implanted in Syrian society historically and these are tried to be illustrated in a historical context below.

Sects and Sectarianism in Syria

The religion and sects always correlated with the identity formation. Syria is the state where religious and sectarian identities are one of the key determinants of the ongoing conflict. Besides, the current conflict and order of identities have also deep roots in Syria's history. Ottoman rule lasted nearly four hundred years in today's Syrian territory and it had two implications for different groups and sects. First, although the communities divided along religious and sectarian lines, various communities lived together without a great fight broke up among them. Second, Sunni families and groups had the privileged positions in Arab territories of the Empire which truly cooperated with them. For much of their history, under the rule of Ottoman Empire and before, Alawi groups had been politically and economically deprived and geographically isolated (Robinson, Connable, Thaler, Scotten, 2018: 75). The privileged position of Sunnis did not change in Syria after the Ottoman Empire.

After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Arab territories of the Empire turned over to colonial administrations and arranged into zones of influence between Great Britain and France. The territories subsequently known as Syria and Lebanon were allotted to France. The mandate regime arbitrarily divided Syria into a number of administrative units and continued their policy of separating Syria and Lebanon. At the same time, the French rule discouraged political responsibility and experience since they did not grant independent decision-making authority. The top bureaucratic positions were held by the French bureaucrats and French advisors could veto the decisions of Syrian officials (Cleveland and Bunton, 2009: 222). All

these policies set out nationalist aspirations and Sunni notables led opposition movements against French regime.

The most of local notables had the monopoly over politics from the time of Ottoman Empire and enhanced their power more with new commercial activities and new commercial routes (Ismael and Ismael, 2010: 243). The Syrian local notables possessed the same economic and religious characteristics; they were mainly composed of Sunni and urban segments of the society (Ismael and Ismael, 2010: 226). The monopoly of urban centers and Sunni local notables grew at the expense of underprivileged Shi'a rural segments. The rural Shi'a population continued to be impoverished and marginalized. The marginalization resulted in searching of avenues for social upward mobility.

The main source of upward mobility was the military academy founded by the French mandate in 1920. The academy, with higher standards of education, shaped the new generation of Syrian students and provided a new social network. The most of Sunni population and Sunni urban notables did not prefer or regard the military education and did not enroll their sons in the academy. Besides, they were not in need of upward mobility that the academy unintendedly provided. However, underprivileged Shi'a sects (Nusayris/Arab Alawis, Druzes and Ismailis) with rural and poorer background seek a career in the army and encouraged their relatives to enroll in the army. The military academy became a place for social advancement and upward mobility for those underprivileged parts of the society. After their education, the military produced new secular Syrian elite who were mainly from the Shi'a sects and changes in social strata started from the time of military academy. The new officers of Shi'a elite, (mainly Nusayris/ Arab Alawis) would have long-term implications for Syrian politics and governments. The French mandate elevated the Alawi's economic, social and political status. The upward social mobility of Alawis did not abandon the centuries of awareness and marginalization of the sectarian identity. It resulted in a new kind of hierarchy among Sunnis and Alawis and Sunni resentment of Alawis.

Sectarianism under the Rule of Ba'ath Party and Hafez al-Assad

After the independence in 1946, the country was weak in terms of necessary institutions and manpower to establish a state. The independence was accompanied by a period of instability. The ethnic and religious divisions, rivalries between urban

centers, the social and economic gap between the urban and rural areas, tension between the Western and traditional way of thinking, lack of courage and confidence to rule the new state and the absence of a uniting power resulted in a very weak and unstable state and society (Cohen, 2014: 159-160).

The Syrian society had long been characterized by strong sectarian divisions although Sunnis tried to forge unity in terms of social and religious discord. However, Sunnis had already contentious conflicts among themselves. While Sunni Muslims and Christians are dispersed, Nusayris, Druzes and Ismailis are compact minority communities forming regional majorities (Cohen, 2014: 244). In addition, Shi'a minority increased their power by recruiting the army after 1920s and it was easier for them to unite because of their connections in the army and strong local ties rather than the Sunnis.

The involvement of the army in politics was considered almost appropriate since it was the only organized institution. There were factions and rivalries within the army in terms of political affiliation or ethnic/sectarian divisions. The Ba'th Party and Alawis were able to eliminate other factions and sects and eventually came to dominate the political life and the army. The Ba'th revolution in 1963 was an important event that changed the old pattern of Sunni rule which had been the same from the time of Ottoman Empire (Cleveland and Bunton, 2009: 222). The Sunni urban elite was replaced by the coalition of new social forces led by the army and the Ba'th Party. Eventually, military officers dominated the Party and removed ideological constraints after 1966 (Hinnebusch, 2015: 22). Hafez al-Assad rose to among these social forces with different agendas. After this date, all developments inside Syria made the position of the army, the party, and the state weaker and Hafez al-Assad stronger (Cohen, 2014: 161).

Hafez al-Assad removed urban oligarchical Sunni notables controlling Syria for generations. A new ruling class, mainly young army officers from rural areas, replaced these notables and the core group of which were Alawis. Still, al-Assad tried to present his rule with the image of popular democracy not a military dictatorship or the regime of a minority. Also, he improved the life conditions of the Sunni rural majority, broadened education system, economic and social infrastructure (Cohen, 2014: 171). Moreover, he incorporated a cross-sectarian and cross-class coalition. The Damascene Sunni bourgeoisie, Sunni and non-Sunni villages started to support his regime. By the help of rural support and bureaucratic, co-opted bourgeois elites, he won a relative success to defeat fundamentalist uprisings of 1978-1982 and to

defeat opposition of Sunni Nasserites and Muslim Brotherhood. According to Hinnebusch, his personal authority was 'semi-institutionalized in an office partly bureaucratic, partly patrimonial, a virtual presidential monarchy' (Hinnebusch, 2001: 5).

Despite of cross sectarian coalition, the Alawi minority dominated the army-party symbiosis for the time of his rule. At the core, his family members, clan and close followers headed the regime. The public sector employment was mostly concentrated in the hands of Alawis and regime's supporters (Wimmen, 2017: 65) For some authors, the very nature of the Syrian ruling system does not lie on confessional or ideological factors, but the ruling system's true essence is Assad family and their strategic alliances (Alvarez-Ossorio and de Teran, 2013: 186) with the support of co-opted bourgeoisie and bureaucrats. Very small minority took the advantages of political representation and domination of the economy. The sects were instrumentalized as a key ingredient of the regime (Hinnebusch, 2019: 50), but Ba'th Party and Hafez All Assad's policies of inclusion of different segments of society helped to preserve the regime based on class with crony capitalism (Donati, 2013; Lawson 2018).

Moreover, the 'revolutionary' language and the authoritarian practices were one of the main discourses of the regime. For some authors, 'the Syrian society has not been atomized or disciplined in the same way as Western societies' (Sottimano, 2009: 34). The disciplinary practices, constant indoctrination of the society and the cult of Hafez al-Assad (Wedeen, 1999) in daily life resulted in docile subjects and a disciplined society (Sottimano, 2009: 33-34). Assad's cult provided guidelines for appropriate behaviors and the Syrian society were 'not required to believe but they are required to act as if' (Wedeen, 1999: 30-31). The authoritarian regimes and constant exposure of disciplinary practices often led cynicism, suspicion, fear, pretending acts, and self-censorship distinctly visible in the society.

Sectarianism under the Rule of Bashar al-Assad

Many people from the various sects took part in the military, governmental positions, and economic initiatives during the rule of Hafez al-Assad and some Sunni notables from the urban areas benefited from the trade. However, this co-optation and inclusion strategies started to change in the era of Bashar al-Assad. The regime sought to decrease the power of Sunni notables to consolidate the central power of

Bashar al-Assad. At the same time new business opportunities were provided at the framework of neoliberal polices (Hinnebusch, 2011). The large segment of Alawis did not actually benefited from the al-Assad rule, instead presidential family gained much of the new investment (Matar, 2016; Ababsa, 2015) and this situation enhanced the perception of Alawi dominance under the rule of Bashar al-Assad. Besides, reduction of subsidies in food and fuel, decreasing the welfare state programs due to neoliberal policies and drought of recent years resulted in decrease of support to the regime (Matar, 2016; Ababsa, 2015) and increase in vulnerability of the regime to conflicts.

When the uprising began in 2011, the language of the protestors was not sectarian. There is evidence that the very reason for the uprising was the economic policies of Bashar al-Assad. The regime's mismanagement of economic transformation, poverty and social inequalities resulted in great resentment among majority of the population (Conduit, 2016; Phillips, 2015). Opposition represented a struggle against an oppressive, authoritarian regime with its crony capitalists and the regime's response to protestors was violent. The conflict at the beginning was too complex to explain with ancient hatreds and theological disagreements of sects.

Although there is no evidence that the regime coordinated a sectarian strategy and sometimes government forces worked at cross purposes (Bishara, 2013), sectarianism was an advantageous and a powerful tool to manipulate by the regime and regional actors as proxy conflict organized along ethno-sectarian lines (Heydeman, 2013). The news about the attacks on Sunni mosques, which were sanctuaries for protestors, or the alleged assassinations of Alawi security officers were all perceived as expressions of sectarian hatred of both protestors and the regime (Wimmen, 2017). Sects were always one of the primary expression of identities in Syria and such kind of perceptions turned the conflict easily into a sectarian one. Before the war many Syrians refused to define their identity belonging to a sect (Stolleis, 2015: 8), nevertheless this strong resistance may imply how strong these identities were.

The common perception is that all Alawis support al-Assad family was not true until the violence peaked. However, when the violence escalated in 2011, Alawis closed ranks behind Bashar al-Assad and ascended to the inner circles because of fear, loyalty or personal gains. In addition, the regime's violent response to opponents and domination of hardliner politicians at the core of the regime accompanied to the transformation of identities of opponents. Many Sunni activists

turned into Islamist jihadists; millions of Syrians became migrants within the borders of other states.

As in the civil war studies, identity groups are most likely to rebel when they are excluded from political power (Gurr, 2000, Cederman et. al., 2010; Roessler, 2011) And discrimination creates motives for violence based on grievances to obtain access to benefits of political and economic power. In Syria identity groups, mainly sects are systematically excluded from representative institutions. Identification of economic and political opportunities with Alawis, existing communal divisions before the conflict (Wimmen, 2017:65-67), regional and non-regional external actors, played significant roles in escalation and sectarianization of the uprising. Following the months of the uprising, the rhetoric of protestors changed, and sectarian identity became one of the most important elements in the conflict. Nowadays Syrians are permanently reminded of sectarian identity and emphasis on sects would continue in a foreseeable future.

Constructivist Approach and Reconciliation in Post-Conflict Syria

Sectarianism associated with strong particularistic solidarity within a group and potential enmity towards the other may be politically divisive and may lead to exclusionary governance practices (Hinnebusch, 2019: 42). In many cases, ethnic, religious, linguistic differences may be a deterrent to democracy. According to Brubaker, it is easier to compromise rival claims of ethnic groups than those of divinely sanctioned religious edicts (Brubaker, 2015). If the regimes represent one group of religion or sect, as in the case of Syria, it may automatically exclude others.

Like many people, Syrian society have multiple layers of identities as family, tribe, ideology, nation, and region, but sectarian identities are facet of identity one asserts and inseparable from identity formation despite of fuzzy character. Once the sectarian identities were always there to assert and intensified during the conflict, Syrian society and the regime cannot eliminate sectarianism after the conflict ends and a post-conflict regime is established. That is why despite of different reasons of the war, once the sectarianism hardened, intensified, and mobilized, it is difficult to turn back and impossible to ignore in post-conflict order.

Understanding the power of identity and the origins of sectarianization are necessary when the conflict ends, and the time of reconciliation efforts of the society comes. All conflicts in the world demonstrate us that identity politics is so powerful

and has to be dealt in conflict resolution and reconciliation processes. If it is not the case and fundamental changes are absent there is always a potential for renewed hostility and violence.

By the possible help of outside powers Syrian conflict will end eventually. It will be simplistic to depend all solutions on Assad's power. Whether he leaves or stays in power, it will mean Syrian society will have to revert to the tradition of multi religious tolerance. Perhaps aided by external peace offers, by reintegrating opponents, reconciliation measures have to be taken. As Jouejati says what do Syrians want 'the right for all Syrians to live in peace and dignity, to freely practice their religious and political beliefs, to be equal citizens before the law' (Jouejati, 2015). This may mean a reconciled society with a democratic system.

Identity is not something visible or tangible, but its very presence is so prevalent. There is profound disagreement on whether identities are primordial, constructed, singular or multiple. However, there is very rare disputes whether identities exist or not (Malesevic, 2006: 16). According to Brubaker and Cooper these understandings of identity range from strong to weak uses of the concept of identity and social constructivist approach prefers to work with identities (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 10- 14). Identity is itself a historical product of modernity and has worldwide popularity and one of the central concepts in social sciences. Multiple disciplines expand literature on types of identity as class, ethnic, national, religious, gender, and other identities and their roles in political, social, and economic areas (Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston, and McDermott, 2009: 17). R. Smith stated that identity is 'among the most normatively significant and behaviorally consequential aspects of politics, yet the literature has remained diffuse' (Smith, 2002: 302). Although for many social scientists the concept of identity is overused (Dolon and Todoli, 2008: 3) in contemporary societies it may still lead to conflicts or even civil wars. It has a history in social sciences (Weigert, Smith-Teitge, and Teitge, 1986) but in this global age, it is ubiquitous and current popularity is unique (Verkuyten, 2005: 40).

After wars and mass atrocities, former adversaries of each conflict have to take measures of resolution and reconciliation so that former hatreds and grievances no longer block the development of new and cooperative relations. In post-conflict societies as will be in Syria, structural conflict resolution measures will be the first step since parties in the conflict have to establish mutually accepted structural and institutional mechanisms including security, economic and political matters to resolve disagreements (Kacowitz, 2000). After structural measures, reconciliation

processes may underlie socio-psychological perspectives. It offers psychological process of cognitive and emotional aspects (Bar-Simon-Tov, 2004). This type of reconciliation necessitates transformation of identities, establishment of basic level of trust and rapprochement between former adversaries (Bar-Tal, 2007; Kelman, 2004). The last approach of reconciliation mentions collective healing, rehabilitation of victims and offenders, apology and forgiveness (Staub, 2011; Nadler and Shnabel, 2008; Tutu, 1999). The process of reconciliation is not composed of linear stages. Measures which are related with security, economic and political matters, mutual acknowledgement, justice, truth telling, apology, reparation, and forgiveness may not follow in any set order (Rosoux, 2009). In post-conflict Syria, if a permanent peace among society is the ultimate goal, resolution and reconciliation processes have to be started by taking sectarian sentiment and vulnerability into consideration in each stage. Any failure to reintegrate all sects into post-conflict order may mean storing up sectarian hatreds for future new conflicts.

The constructivist approach to conflicts, conflict resolution and reconciliation can contribute and complement understanding of the conflict and afterwards. Constructivist approaches emphasize both structural and discursive transformations (Jackson, 2009). Resolution, reconciliation, and constructivist theory are interrelated that both suggest reconstructing structures, interests, and identities. In post-conflict Syrian case as well as other conflicts, structural conditions have to be transformed first obviously. If economic deprivation, discrimination, political injustice, and allocation of these resources based on sects, exclusionary identities remain; these conditions neither allow reconciliation nor prevent a new conflict. Especially by the help of constructivist approach to identities, it is possible to draw some conclusions for the sectarian identities in Syria. The Constructivist approach take identities not preexisting, fixed to society and culture; rather they are context dependent and continuously evolving and open to transformation (Jackson, 2009).

The experience of violence not only remained present in individual and collective memories, but it also effects how Syrians imagine their future in their homeland and their relationship to each other (Wimmen, 2017). In most of the post-conflict societies reconciliation is hindered by those kinds of memories of violence. These memories propagating by the elite may make sectarian identities and polarization hardened, then reconciliation measures cannot be achieved if polarization and sectarianization continue after the conflict. To enable reconciliation

hostile attitudes and polarization have to be eased, intergroup attitudes change, and more inclusive identities should be developed (Kelman, 2004).

Democratic political culture has its own social and sociopolitical preconditions. For Almond and Verba the political culture of a society means the political system as internalized in the cognitions, evaluations, and feelings of citizens (Almond and Verba, 1989: 13). The first and foremost is the pluralistic culture based on a culture of consensus, diversity, active citizen participation and moderation, inclusive attitude toward other groups, capacity for sharing values with others, and multivalued orientation (Almond and Verba, 1989: 6-34). Besides, individuals are expected to develop a sense of common political identity which implies common commitment primarily to the political system (Almond and Verba, 1989: 371).

After the violence comes to an end in Syria, the main concern will be restructuring and reconciliation processes in the country. First, the reconciliation processes necessitate to establish a new political system having democratic political values. Nevertheless, the development of a stable and effective democratic government depends upon more than the electoral processes (Almond and Verba, 1989: 366). The political culture should support the system for the success of it. 'The civic spirit of the early uprising' (Wimmen, 2017:64) without a sectarian character is expected to reveal again and allow a new political culture with the help of reconciliation measures. After the violence ends, absence of change of political culture and sectarian emphasis may end up politicized sectarian rifts again. Our research tries to illustrate the internalized cognitions and religious attachment among Syrian migrants and exile communities.

Research Design

Methodology

The survey research was conducted over a four-month period. The purpose of the research is mainly explorative and descriptive. That is, the research aims at examining migrant Syrians ideas and thoughts about the political leadership and such related concepts as the sources of identity, the perception and awareness of identity, the relationships among contending groups and the moderation of these relationships. Since the circumstances in the region are politically sensitive and complex, a conventional sample of 202 Syrian migrants was purposefully selected. The sample includes those migrants living around Kirikhan, Iskenderun, Reyhanli, Samandag and Yayladagi sites of Turkey-Syria border. Informed consent from all

participants was obtained and responses were collected anonymously to ensure that the information gathered was kept secure.

Data Collection Process

The interview schedule (Neuman, 2011: 312) as the main research instrument containing the set of questions tapping on the abstract concepts was designed in a way to keep questions as simple and understandable as possible. The questions were read and asked to the participants, and responses were written down on the interview schedule form by the interviewer herself or himself. The interview schedule was administered by two interviewers, one who is a native Syrian speaker asking and explaining questions whenever a confusion arose over what was actually intended. The other interviewer who is fluent in both Turkish and Arabic interviewer recorded the responses. Interviews were conducted in places where respondents felt secure in order to get their genuine ideas and thoughts and eliminate the outside intervention as much as possible.

Some important observations on the data collection process deserve attention. Although the anonymity was guaranteed, Syrian migrants were generally reluctant to accept the participation in the survey research. Some seemed to have a tendency to give socially desirable responses and 'self-censorship' on some questions. And some of those who were initially willing to participate, rejected to give responses to some questions, therefore not completed the interview schedule. Missing or biased data were eliminated during the data cleaning based on interviewers' assessments on the interviewing process.

Interview questions were prepared in Turkish. Then they were translated into Arabic and Turkish back by two competent translators. The syntactical and semantic errors were corrected, and the final interview form were constructed in Arabic.

Data Analysis

Variables included in the interview schedule are mostly categorical measured at nominal or ordinal levels. Due to the categorical nature of the variables, Frequency and percent distribution tables are the main statistical analysis tools. The frequency distributions allow descriptive univariate analyses, conforming to the explorative and descriptive purposes of the survey. It must be noted that the present

research has no inferential goal. That is, the aim is not to generalize to the population of Syrian migrants. The sample drawn allows only descriptive hypothesis-generation, because it is not a random sample in which each population element has an equal or pre-known chance of being selected to the sample. Since the sample is not randomly selected no inferential statistical technique of data analysis can be employed.

The data entry and analysis were carried out by IBM SPSS 22 statistical software (IBM Corp. Released, 2013). Data cleaning concerning missing responses and material recording errors was done in cooperation with the interviewers. After the data cleaning, the data were entered by the interviewers themselves who were trained by the statistical expert.

Table 1
Frequency distribution of the most important identification sources

	Frequency	Percent
Humanity	140	70.0
Religion	34	17.0
Sect	4	2.0
Ideology	5	2.5
Family	9	4.5
Tribe	4	2.0
Political party	3	1.5
Other	1	0.5
Total	200	100.0

Table 1 contains the frequency distribution for the question 'what do you identify yourself most with?'. Table shows that the great majority of respondents (%70) choose 'humanity' to describe themselves most often. Religion is the second most frequent category as the identification source (%17). Other factors such as ideology, family, tribe and political party are treated relatively less important by participants.

Although the humanity seems to be the most distinct category for the respondents who attach their identities most, it is rather abstract and idealistic group, as the respondents would readily see themselves as part of the humanity. Most of the respondents after answering the question, named the second category,

religion. It comes to particularistic categories unlike humanity, religion seems to provide the most important identity anchorage.

Table 2
Political party leaders should be those local notables of a sect you belong to

	Frequency	Percent
Disagree	73	36.14
Undecided	25	12.38
Agree	104	51.49
Total	202	100.00

Table 2 present findings reflecting participants' opinions on the social status of the political party leaders. More than half of the respondents (%51.49) seem to be in the same page on the opinion that political party leaders should be notable members of the respondents' religious sect. Those who are undecided about the party leaders being sectarian notables' amounts to only %12.38. Table provide the finding that only the minority of Syrian migrants disagree on the idea that political party leaders should not be one of those who are notables of respondents' religious sect. This finding brings up the issue of the relationship between the sectarian leadership and the reconciliation of the sectarian conflict, which is the landmark of the political turmoil in Syria today. A politics mostly driven by the leadership in Syria and the perception of the participants bears the germ of future conflicts, unless the leaders adopt political cultural values of moderation and tolerance in the reconciliation process of post-conflict Syria.

Table 3
Political party leaders should be those who are opinion leaders representing the common ideology of your group.

	Frequency	Percent
Disagree	66	32.67
Undecided	34	16.83
Agree	102	50.50
Total	202	100.00

Table 3 reflects the parallel findings to what table 2 provides. Almost half of

the participants (%50.5) agree on the idea that the political party leader should be the opinion leader at the same time. 'The opinion leader' concept was operationalized as the one who represent the shared beliefs and the common ideology of a group. It is clear that the leadership representing the shared values of a group is what the majority of respondents adhere to. This may be interpreted as a natural tendency among member of a group that is homogenous in terms of the ideology. However, perceived group homogeneity embodied in the opinion leadership may pose a threat to other groups, may prolong conflicts, and may turn the existing conflicts to intractable conflicts. Therefore, it may make reconciliation hard to achieve. That is, this finding latently indicates an indirect, negative attitude hold by half of the respondents towards one of the inseparable values of democratic political culture, the pluralism.

Table 4
A member of the contending group or sect may persuade you on reasonable grounds to vote for his or her own political party.

	Frequency	Percent
Disagree	86	42.79
Undecided	41	20.40
Agree	74	36.82
Total	201	100.00

Table 4 presents information about the respondents' views on openness to persuasion. Basically, the majority of respondents (%42.79) seem to be resistant to the idea that a person from an unwanted group or sect would persuade them, even if he or she yields admissible reasons, to vote for the political party pursuing the interests of that unwanted group. It means that the majority of the respondents tend to downgrade the dialogical aspect of the democracy for mutual persuasion at present. Such a situation would nevertheless form a barrier against reasonable consensus and hence moderation in a democratic polity (Kegley and Skowronski, 2013). From the view of democratic political culture, if the dispute and controversy of various kind do not result in consensus on sensitive issues relevant to political integrity, the result would be destructive, which would therefore separate the contending groups further.

Table 5
If a regime change occurs in Syria, the reconciliation among opposing groups can be achieved.

	Frequency	Percent
Disagree	58	29.15
Undecided	29	14.57
Agree	112	56.28
Total	199	100.00

The results presented in table 5 below show that more than half of the respondents (% 56.28) set a precondition for the reconciliation among opposing groups in Syria on a change of the current regime. Moreover, nearly one third of the respondents (%29.15) are still pessimistic about the reconciliation, even if the regime change actually happens. Based on the findings it can be argued that the regime change is assumed to create favorable conditions for the respondents, not for the advocates of current regime. Therefore, it is highly questionable whether advocates of the current regime would want reconciliation at all after the presumed regime change.

Table 6
If the regime change occurs in Syria, the moderation of the relations among opposing groups is likely to begin.

	Frequency	Percent
Disagree	61	30.65
Undecided	27	13.57
Agree	111	55.78
Total	199	100.00

Findings supporting the argument above can also be obtained from Table 6. Table 6 presents the frequency distribution of the response categories of the statement 'If the regime change occurs in Syria, the moderation of the relations among opposing groups is likely to begin'. It is clear from the table that %55.78 of the participants with valid answers agree on the statement above. In other words, more than half of the respondents see the possibility of the moderation of currently conflictual relations among contending groups only dependent upon the regime

change. Still, Table 6 gives an indirect insight in that more than half of the respondents conceive the current regime in Syria as the main culprit of the situation, and without its change moderation is impossible. Furthermore, again nearly one third of the respondents (%30.65) do not hold any hope for the moderating discourse on the relations with the opposing groups. It must be noticed that respondents view themselves as disadvantaged and powerless against the current Syrian government. The moderation, however, implies mutual relations between equal and free parties.

From the other side, we should mention that almost half of the respondents (answers of 'disagree' and 'undecided' in table 5, 29+14 % and in table 6, 30+13 %) do not believe moderation or reconciliation among opposing groups after the regime change occurs. It may be implied that disagreement between the contending groups are penetrated in the very part of the culture. The grievances deepened through time and regime change may not be enough to reconcile.

We may emphasize some significant point s about the survey. For instance, the results related with the question of the identification of the self in table 1 shows that majority of respondents answered humanity. After answering the humanity, majority of the respondents named the second category, religion. It is a particularistic category and religion seems the primary identity source.

In addition, Syrian migrants agree on the idea that political party leaders should be one of the notables of any sect. However, sectarian based political party leadership and confessional politics are not welcome by democratic political culture. Although the conflict may have not start with sectarian reasons, allocation of political and economic resources based on sects are already the very reason of the conflict. In spite of the fact, respondents are akin to choose sectarian leaderships.

We also remind that significant part of respondents (with answers of 'disagree' and 'undecided' in table 5 and table 6) do not believe moderation or reconciliation among opposing groups after the regime change occurs. It may be implied that grievances and disagreement between different sects are penetrated and implanted in the very part of the culture. The grievances deepened through time and regime change or stay will not be enough reconcile.

Conclusion

Multiethnic or multi sectarian communities are composed of different groups, which may have grievances between themselves and in these circumstances,

in-group attachments may strengthen. Multi sectarian groups give their primary loyalty to their sects and rather than the broader community, nation, polity or political system. Besides their political behaviors are a reflection of their concerns with matters of politics, security or welfare of their sectarian group rather than those of the country as a whole. Syria is also divided into parochial communities where the strongest identities are with the clan, tribe, sect and sectarian cleric or family. All regimes in Syria undermined social cohesion whether it is religious or secular type of rule. From the early times, social community was confined by religious identity and the main discourse was religious and sectarian.

The literature about the Syrian civil war emphasizes the beginning of the conflict was not sectarian, instead anti-regime, anti-discrimination and anti-oppression of a closed circle government. Although it is conventional to accept this statement, it is also easy to see how quickly the conflict turn into a sectarian one and a few violent instances were enough to trigger the identity politics. Involvement of regional and outside actors in the conflict by taking sectarian sides is one of the reasons that helped sectarianization of the conflict. However more importantly, in a long period of time, allocation of scarce resources, jobs, government job opportunities were shared along sectarian lines and ineffective and oppressive governance intensified sectarian identities. Sects were and are always the primary expression of identity and emphasis and existence of sectarian identities remained constant in the country.

The conflict of Syria today became related with these identities. Once it is stated that the conflict did not start with theological sectarian claims and old hatreds, the conflict sectarianized. Sectarianism continues to define and dominate Syrian's lives and becomes almost the basis for entire political claims. All political and social contexts inform the primacy of sectarian identity and prevalence of sectarianism since sectarian affiliation is based on combination of communal political and economic interests rather than religious heterodoxy.

The society which is divided into parochial communities of sects and sectarian groups giving their primary loyalty to their sects rather than the society or political system as a whole. This implies us that priority of sectarian identity among the hierarchy of identities that compose the self cannot be eliminated from consideration in post-conflict Syria. It may also be a barrier to achieve peace and reconciliation, develop democratic values of political participation, electoral processes, and tolerance.

Thus, whether an actual mutuality and reconciliation among conflicting groups can be achieved after the conflict ends and/or change is open to discussion. What can

indirectly be inferred from above findings purport that the regime change is understood as a shift of the political power from one group to another, which does not imply the inauguration of a new and democratic regime as it is supposed by the most respondents.

In this study, with the help of survey research with migrants and exile communities, it is tried to illustrate that the sectarian identity is the key to understand Syrian society. It has a great role getting primary expression in forging identities in the country. It provides political and economic benefits for the communities. Therefore, it is almost impossible to reconcile Syrian society after the conflict without considering sectarian identities and their role in politics, economy, and social matters.

When the violence comes to an end resolution and reconciliation processes are supposed to begin. In this expected long period of reconciliation, the degree of sectarian attachment should be marginalized so as to be normalized part of democratic political culture side by side other equally important democratic values. Diminishing role of sectarian emphasis in societal, political and economic structures and discourses is the main pillar of new political order and constructivist approach may have a contribution in this identity construction. Besides reintegration of Sunnis into post-conflict Syria is a necessary step to prevent future sectarian hatred. This research tries to help to explain that strong sectarian attachments may undermine reconciliation in post-conflict Syria and democratic values in terms of expectations about political party leaders, moderation, and tolerance.

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