

**British Columbia's Syrian Diaspora's Understanding of
Conflict, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation
In Post-Peace Accord Syria**

By

Nour-Eddine Maghnaoui

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University of
Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Joint Master's Program in Peace and Conflict Studies

University of Manitoba/University of Winnipeg

Winnipeg, MB

Abstract

This exploratory qualitative study recruited twelve members of the Syrian refugee diaspora living on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada, to explore how they perceive conflict and peace in their homeland, what would constitute sustainable peace in Syria, and how do they intend to contribute to peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts in post-conflict Syria. Since conflict eruption in 2011, the study participants have lost close family members. They incurred various forms of hardships in their journeys of displacement. They expressed their desire to return to their communities in Syria upon the cessation of violence, and the restoration of peace and safety. The participants' proposed path to sustainable peace and conflict transformation in Syria include a constructive role for regional and external powers in the peacebuilding efforts, and that democratization, the organization of free elections, freedom, the rule of law, equality, and inclusiveness must be embedded in a new peace architecture. Further, to transform the conflict they proposed the inclusion in the peacebuilding process of retribution, forgiveness, communal peacemaking and community trust-building, and educational system reform. The participants' in-depth conflict analysis and their approaches to transform the conflict provide some interesting insights to build sustainable peace in this violent and divided society. This study contributes to the Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) literature by highlighting the crucial role of diasporas in peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts, and informing the peacebuilding enterprise policymakers about the necessity to incorporate locals in conflict analysis and transformation processes.

Acknowledgments

I would like to recognize and express my utmost gratitude to all those who assisted me in my research journey and completion of this thesis, including, my thesis committee members, my family members, and friends.

I would like to express my appreciation to my thesis advisor Dr. Sean Byrne for his tremendous support, encouragement, and constructive feedback that contributed to the success of this thesis. I would also like to extend my gratitude to my thesis committee members, Dr. Michelle Gallant, and Dr. Dean Peachy. Your questions and comments have meaningfully contributed to steer this thesis towards completion. I would also like to thank the staff and my colleagues at the Arthur V. Mauro Centre for Peace and Justice, St. Paul College. Your support, knowledge and company have made my learning experience at the centre memorable.

Additionally, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my dear mother, Faiza, all Maghnaoui family members, Safwan and Nadia Soufan, Julie and Mohamed Boukhouali for their continuous invaluable moral support, kindness and encouragement throughout my extended years of education as an undergraduate and graduate student.

Furthermore, I would also like to acknowledge with much appreciation the crucial role of my thesis research participants. The content of this thesis is the outcome of your stories and experiences.

Last, but not least, to my caring, loving, and supportive wife, Samaa Soufan: *My Deepest Gratitude*. Your moral support and encouragement are much appreciated and forever cherished.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my father, Omar Maghnaoui, who had immensely supported me, and always inspired me to pursue higher education and utmost levels of integrity.

I also dedicate this thesis to my son Elias Maghnaoui. I hope that you and all children in the world live in a peaceful, fruitful and safe environment.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	i
ACNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
DEDICATION	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
Significance of the Study	5
Outline of the thesis	6
Conclusion	8
CHAPTER 1 – HISTORICAL CONTEXT	9
1.1- Introduction	9
1.2- Ethnic Intergroup Relationships under the French Protectorate (1920-1946)	10
1.3- Syria’s Political Dynamics in Post-Independence Syria Period (1946-1970)	12
1.4- Power Struggle in the Post-Independence Period-Era of Military Coups	14
1.5- Assad Dynasty – Rise of Hafez Assad	16
1.6- The Inauguration of Bashar Assad	19
1.7- Climate Change and Conflict in Syria	24
1.8- Arab Spring Uprising- A Desperate Call for Reform and Socioeconomic Justice	27
1.9- Anti-Assad Protests- From a call for Reform to Regime Change	28
1.10- Syria’s Civil War – The Shift from Protests to Armed Struggle	29
1.11- The Human Cost of Syria’s Civil war	30
1.11.1- Pro-Assad Forces Indiscriminate Attacks	31
1.11.2- Use of Chemical Weapons	32
1.11.3- Arbitrary Arrest, Torture, and Death in Custody	33
1.11.4- Assad’s Cover-up Strategy	38
1.11.5- Assad’s External Allies- Guilty by Association	39
1.12- Radical-Terrorist Militant Groups’ War Crimes against Humanity	40
1.13- Non-Terrorist Militant Groups Human Rights Atrocities	42
1.14- Syrian Refugee Crisis: A Humanitarian Crisis with a Global Magnitude	42
1.15- Conclusion	44
CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW	45
2.1- Introduction	45
2.2- Causes of Conflict	46
2.2.1- Social Cubism	46
2.2.2- Collective Identity	49
2.2.3- Human Needs Theory	52
2.2.4- Structural and Direct Violence	53
2.3- Peacebuilding	55
2.3.1- Peacebuilding Paradigms	55

2.3.2- Neoliberal Peace Approach-Top Down Approach	58
2.3.3- Emancipatory Peacebuilding- Bottom-Up Approach	61
2.3.4- Hybrid Peacebuilding Approach	64
2.3.5- External Intervention and Peacebuilding	65
2.3.6- The Role of Diaspora in Peacebuilding	68
2.4- Conflict Transformation and Reconciliation Theory	72
2.4.1- Indigenous and Local Communal Peacebuilding Approaches	75
2.4.2- The Path To Reconciliation- Judicial and non-judicial Transitional Justice	78
2.4.3-Individual Accountability: Retribution as a Prerequisite for Reconciliation	81
2.4.4- Non-Judicial Route towards Reconciliation and Healing	82
2.4.5- Peace Education’s Contributions to Transformative Change in Post-conflict	86
2.5- Conclusion	89
CHAPTER 3 –RESEARCH METHODS AND METHODOLOGY	91
3.1- Introduction	91
3.2- Recruitment Strategy	91
3.3- Qualitative Research Approach	93
3.4- Semi-Structured in-depth Individual Interviews on Sensitive Topics	95
3.5- Research Questions and Scope of the Study	98
3.6- The Study Participants’ Profiles and Research Sites	100
3.7- Data Analysis: Encoding and Memo Writing	103
3.8- Ethics Commitments	104
3.9- Conclusion	105
CHAPTER 4 – SYRIA BEFORE CONFLICT	106
4.1- Introduction	106
4.2- Syria’s Economic Living Standards	107
4.3- Collective Identity: Intergroup Relationships	111
4.4- Sectarianism As a State Policy	121
4.5- Nepotism, Corruption, and Abuse of Power	125
4.6- Police-State: Political Violence and a Culture of Fear	129
4.7- Arab Spring Uprising: A Desperate Call for Reform	132
4.8- International Politics: Syria as a Battleground of a Proxy War	138
4.9- Key Findings of the Research	143
4.10- Conclusion	150
CHAPTER 5 – THE SYRIAN DIASPORA’S PERCEPTIONS AND AGENCY IN PEACEBUILDING PROCESSES TO BUILD SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN SYRIA	151
5.1- Introduction	151
5.2- Syrian Diaspora’s Perception of Peacebuilding	152
5.3- The Roadmap to Sustainable Peace in Syria	156
5.4- Syrian Diaspora’s Roles in Peacebuilding Efforts	164

5.4.1 - Individual Contributions	164
5.4.2 - Syrian Diaspora's Collective Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding Capacities	168
5.5- External Powers' Role in Syria's Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding	174
5.6 - Key Findings of the Research	180
5.7 - Conclusion	187
CHAPTER 6 – SYRIAN DIASPORA'S PERCEPTIONS AND AGENCY IN TRANSFORMATIONAL AND RECONCILIATION PROCESSES	188
6.1- Introduction	188
6.2 - Syrian Diaspora's Perceptions About Reconciliation	189
6.3- Conflict Transformation and Intergroup Peaceful Relationship Restoration	194
6.4- Syria's Possible Paths Towards Conflict Transformation	202
6.4.1- Forgetting and Forgiveness As a Way Forward	204
6.4.2- Retributive Transitional Justice	208
6.4.3- Traditional Conflict Resolution Processes	213
6.4.4- Peace Education	218
6.5- Key Findings of the Research	221
6.6- Conclusion	228
CHAPTER 7 – CONCLUSIONS	230
7.1- Introduction	230
7.2 Overall Key Findings	230
7.2.1 - <i>Locals' Organic knowledge- Locals Pivotal Input in Conflict Analysis and Resolution</i>	231
7.2.2 - The Role of Local Communal Leaders In Peacebuilding Efforts	236
7.2.3 - Relative Peace – Negative Peace- Liminal Peace	237
7.2.4 - Diasporas' Role in Peacebuilding and Development	239
7.2.5 - Peacebuilding Approaches in Syria	241
7.2.6 - The Role of External Guarantors in Peacebuilding and Reconciliation Processes	243
7.3 Future Research	244
7.4- Conclusion	245
REFERENCES	247
APPENDICES	260
Appendix 1: The Interview Questions	263
Appendix 2: Recruitment Letter of Participants in Master's Research Project	266
Appendix 3: Recruitment Letter of Participants in Master's Research Project (Arabic Translation)	268
Appendix 4: Informed Consent Form for Human Subject Participation	270
Appendix 5: Informed Consent Form for Human Subject Participation (Arabic Translation)	277
Appendix 6: Research Ethics Application	283

Appendix 7: Research Ethics Approval	291
Appendix 8: Research Ethics Renewal Approval	292

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The anti-Assad protests that spread throughout Syria's main regions in March 2011 were a continuation of the Arab Spring uprisings that swept the Arab autocracies in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), demanding democratization, socioeconomic justice, freedom, and political reform. In Syria, these demands were rejected and met by the brutality of the Assad security forces towards civilian protesters, which thereby intensified the protests, militarized the uprising, and transformed it into an armed struggle. Further, geopolitics, and the mobilization of sectarian identity formations and the near-collapse of the Assad regime in 2014-15 attracted regional and international powers, as well as terrorist groups into Syria, transforming the conflict into a large-scale war that has jeopardized the world's security and stability, causing a humanitarian crisis of global magnitude (UNHCR, 2017; The New York Times, 2018; BBC News, 2017).

In 2010, Syria's total population was 20,720,602 million (World Bank, 2017). However, as of 25 October 2018, 5,629,700 million Syrians have become refugees outside Syria, and 6.6 internally displaced persons (UNHCR, 2018). Yet, there is less emphasis on their perceptions of peace, what constitute sustainable peace, and their approaches to halting violence and transforming the conflict. Driven by Lao Tzu's saying, "start with what they know, build with what they have" (Ryan, 2013, 25), this study seeks to explore how Syrian refugees living in hosting countries like Canada perceive how peacebuilding and reconciliation can be implemented in Syria, and how they intend to contribute to conflict transformation processes in their home communities

in post-conflict Syria. This study uses individual in-depth semi-structured interviews for data collection, as well as a grounded theory methodology for data analysis.

The pictures of destruction, the wounded and killed Syrian people, particularly children, have shaken people around the world. In particular, the picture of Alan Kurdi's body, a young Syrian toddler who drowned and who washed up on a Turkish shore in September 2015 after his parents failed to cross to Greece in a boat piloted by smugglers led to worldwide outrage (The Globe and Mail, 2016). As a result, governments, international organizations and ordinary people condemned the perpetrators, calling upon the conflict protagonists to halt violence and resume peace negotiation talks. There was also an increase in overall public pressure on governments to facilitate the resettlement of Syrian refugees in host countries. In this context, the newly elected Liberal Canadian federal government (2015) pledged to increase the quota of Syrian refugees for resettlement in Canada.

Prior to the arrival of the first wave of Syrian refugees to Canada in late 2015, Canadian non-profit organizations engaged in the resettlement of Syrian refugees called upon Canadian residents to volunteer as translators, and cultural integration facilitators. During that time I was living in Edmonton with my wife. As media coverage about the arrival of Syrian refugees increased, recognition of the urgent need for volunteers (especially those who were fluent in Arabic and English) was trending on social media platforms. Ultimately, I contacted the person responsible for volunteer recruitment at Catholic Social Services, which is considered one of the main non-profit organizations in refugee resettlement in Canada, and signed up to help. Afterwards, I was assigned to a

Syrian family composed of a mother, father and two young children to assist them with their settlement and integration process in Edmonton.

After eight months, I finished the assignment period with the Syrian family. I then moved to Winnipeg to pursue my Master's degree in Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) at the Arthur V. Mauro Centre for Peace and Justice, St. Paul's College at the University of Manitoba. Again, I had the opportunity to volunteer with two local non-profit organizations that assist refugees in their resettlement and integration into Winnipeg. The five partnering institutions included St. Ignatius, Holy Rosary, St. Giani's, St. Paul's College, St. Paul's High School Shrines, and Newcomers Employment and Education Development Services or the NEEDS Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Those volunteer experiences gave me the opportunity to socialize with ordinary Syrian refugees from vastly different backgrounds, and to hear their stories, experiences, hardships, losses, and struggles. Since those refugees came from different regions within Syria (rural, urban, and semi-urban), and had had different professions, socioeconomic statuses, and even identity formations. I noticed that they had different views about the Syrian conflict. Occasionally, I informally discussed with them the unfolding conflict in Syria. In 2016, after one of the chemical attacks against civilians, one of the Syrians told me in a moment of despair and hopelessness, "We, the Syrian people, die every day with missiles, barrel bombs and bullets, but no one cares. The world cares about Syrians only when they die with chemical weapons. It is acceptable for us to die with conventional weapons, but not with chemical weapons." Such a statement condemns the failure of the international community to resolve the Syrian conflict, and also indicates that the

international community has engaged in selective “conflict management,” instead of “conflict resolution” there.

Peacebuilding interventions must be innovative and responsive to people’s hopes, dreams, and fears because, in order to build a peaceful and just society, “people must imagine and articulate the kind of community they desire” (Lederach, 1997, 116). I decided to designate my Master’s research thesis to studying the Syrian refugees’ perceptions of peace, and their hopes and dreams for themselves and their country. In particular, what kind of society they to hope live in in post-conflict, because there is less emphasis, and/or appreciation to the knowledge, and role of refugees in peacebuilding and development efforts in both, the literature, and peacebuilding enterprise. Unfortunately, Syrian refugees in numerous Western-host societies are labeled negatively, and portrayed by ultra right nationalist politicians to the general public as a threat and socioeconomic burden. This study adopts a “reflexive praxis” (Lederach, 1997) peacebuilding approach that regards the perceptions, needs, experiences, and knowledge of individuals who were affected by violent conflict fundamental to conflict transformation processes. I was able to frame and refine this research topic after a lengthy process of discussion and valuable feedback from my research advisor, Professor Sean Byrne and my thesis committee members Professor Michelle Gallant and Professor Dean Peachey.

Driven by Perry and Schenck’s observation (2001) that “peacemaking is the ultimate site for development in that it works towards building a stable environment in which to construct a better life for future generations” (as cited in Snyder, 2011, 45), this study seeks to contribute to both Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) research and

practice by offering peace knowledge and praxis that reflects Syrian society's ethno-political fabric and rich multi-vocal culture. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to emphasize how Syrian refugee diaspora in five communities on Vancouver Island, BC, Canada perceive peacebuilding and reconciliation, and how they intend to contribute individually and collectively to those processes in their home countries?

Significance of the Study

Since WWII, there have been more than 200 Interstate and intrastate violent conflict (Regan, 2013, 184). Those conflicts have disrupted the lives of millions of civilians in zones of conflict, forcing them to flee their habitual regions of residence and create the conditions for grave human rights violations. In 2018, the number of world's refugees reached 68.5 million (UNHCR, 2018). However, there is less emphasis on their perceptions and roles in peacebuilding efforts in their homelands. Instead, it is often conflict protagonists and external guarantors who determine the peace deal terms without meaningful participation and/or consultation with locals, and refugees who forcibly left their communities seeking safety. And yet, these internally displaced locals and refugees abroad are the ones being asked to return to their local communities and live under those peace terms.

Lederach (1997, 24) notes that, "peacebuilding initiatives must be rooted in and be responsive to people's subjective realities, grievances, and needs in order to sustain holistic reconciliation and peace." Thus, this research seeks to convey the experiences, needs, hopes, and fears of twelve Syrian refugees, and their recommendations about appropriate approaches to ending the conflict and restoring peace in Syria. Ultimately, the

participants' knowledge, conflict analyses and suggestions for transformative resolution reflect insider/local knowledge that tends to be more responsive to the conflict's hidden root causes and to fit within an understanding of Syria's complex ethnopolitical structures.

Outline of the Thesis

The body of this thesis consists of seven chapters. Following this introduction, the first chapter presents a brief overview of Syria's modern sociopolitical history in the last century, with an emphasis on intergroup relationships in the post-independence period, as well as some historical context describing Syrian coups and counter-coups, and an outline of characteristics of the Assad dynasty regime. In particular, this overview chapter emphasizes Syria's socioeconomic and political conditions since the inauguration of Bashar Assad in 2000, how those conditions contributed to the eruption of the 2011 anti-government protests, and briefly discusses some of the humanitarian outcomes of the unfolding civil war.

The second chapter presents the theoretical literature review that informed the framework for this study. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section presents analytical concepts and frameworks that explain the eruption of ethnopolitical conflicts. The second section discusses the role of external guarantors and diaspora activism in peacebuilding. The third section explores the possibility of transforming Syria's conflict through reconciliation processes, peace education, and traditional justice processes.

The third chapter presents the employed research methodology used in this study. This study used three methods of recruitment to find and include the twelve study participants: convenient sampling, purposive sampling, and snowball sampling. Further, I conducted semi-structured individual interviews in terms of the data collection and used grounded theory for data analysis. Interviewees were treated with the utmost respect and appreciated for their knowledge and participation. Confidentiality and the anonymity of participants are strictly respected.

The analysis and discussion portion of this study is divided into the middle three chapters known as the empirical/qualitative chapters because they present central themes that emerged inductively from the qualitative data.

Chapter Four presents a picture of Syrian life before the eruption of the 2011 protests, in particular since the inauguration of Bashar Assad in 2000. The subsections in this chapter present the socioeconomic and political conditions, as well as intergroup relationships of the last decade, along with the development of the 2011 protests that erupted into civil war (emphasizing the role of external intervention in the conflict.)

Chapter Five presents the participants' perceptions and potential contributions to peacebuilding efforts in the post-conflict period. With great certitude, participants expressed their aspirations to witness the end of the conflict and to help restore peace in Syria. They assessed the collective organizational capacity of the Syrian diaspora and its capacity to contribute to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Additionally, participants provided numerous proposals to address the root causes of the conflict, which if implemented, would contribute to building a just, inclusive, and peaceful society.

Chapter Six presents the participants' perceptions of reconciliation. Horrific human rights violations have continued to occur during the ongoing civil war, carried out by all conflicting parties. Thus, building a durable peace in post-conflict Syria requires addressing the harm inflicted on victims and their families. Healing is the ultimate goal of all of the participants which, for some looks like retribution, and for others, forgiveness.

Chapter Seven is the final chapter in this study. It composes the key findings and reflections of this study as well as the study limitations and opportunities for future research which are opened up in light of it. This concluding chapter highlights the major findings that emerged inductively from themes and subthemes that are presented before it.

Conclusions

This introduction provides a short overview of the study, its significance, the researcher's background, and outlines how the study proceeds. Artificial analysis of conflict tends to simplify conflict and sum up its causes in one cause or two dismissing deep-rooted factors in history (Cairns & Darby, 1998, 754). Syria's ongoing civil war is an outcome of various hidden and complex factors. Thus, the following chapter, chapter one, provides a chronological overview of Syria over the last century highlighting the major sociopolitical, and economic events/issues that mark its modern history.

CHAPTER ONE: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

1.1 - Introduction

In order to demonstrate how Syria's conflict is the result of a complex set of factors that have evolved since the country's independence, this chapter presents Syria's historical and sociopolitical profile in the last century. This includes an examination of the country since French occupation in 1920, the post-independence era (1946-1970), the establishment of Assad regime in 1970, the inauguration of Bashar Assad in 2000, the eruption of anti- Assad protests in 2011, and the escalation of nonviolent protests into a sectarian civil war involving many external actors. These interacting factors include inter-communal tension, sectarian political rivalry, the rise of identity-based conflict, and the impact of climate change and socioeconomic grievances on the conflict's escalation. A chronological examination of these contingent factors follows and lends itself well to understanding the unfolding of the conflict to create an understanding of which to propose appropriate resolutions.

This research seeks to explore how the study participants perceived the conflict, and how they intend to contribute to peacebuilding and reconciliation processes in post peace accord Syria. In chapter four, Syria Before Conflict, the participants shared their experiences and stories about what Syria looked like before the conflict emerged, during the conflict, and now. This chapter used secondary sources to examine Syria's sociopolitical and economic context before 2011, and how that context led to conflict eruption, escalation, and protraction.

1.2 - Ethnic Intergroup Relationships under the French Protectorate (1920-1946)

For five centuries (1516-1918), modern Syria with its current borders was part of the Ottoman Empire (McHugo, J. 2015, 38, 42). During WWI, France and Britain formed a series of coalitions with Arab nationalists and regional Arab leaders who opposed Turkish rule in the Middle East, promising them full support to form independent Arab states. However, prior to the end of the war, France and Britain signed a secret mutual accord known as the Sykes-Picot agreement that divided the Ottoman Empire's territories between themselves at the end of the war (McHugo, J. 2015, 53).

In 1918, France and Britain alongside Amir Faysal jointly established a short-lived state in Syria called the "Kingdom of Syria," which lasted for two years. (Ma'oz, & Yaniv, 2014, 14). During the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, Faysal expressed his aspirations to rule Greater Syria, which included the territory of what became modern Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine, and he requested "self-determination" for Arabs – a concept which was supported by then-American president Woodrow Wilson. Despite this support, Britain withdrew its troops from Syria the same year in compliance with the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and in 1920, France consolidated its forces in Syria, abolishing Faysal's Syrian Arab Kingdom and transformed it into a "French Protectorate" under a mandate of the League of Nations from July 24, 1922 onward (Rabil, 2006, 6-9; Polk, 2013). The abolition of the Syrian Arab Kingdom was a crucial setback in the process of creating an independent Arab state. It fostered the articulation of Arab nationalist sentiments and a united Arab consciousness amongst Syria's ethnic groups and intelligentsia (Rabil, 2006, 8-9; McHugo, J. 2015, 61, 67).

At that time, Syria was and is a very diverse community. Its main ethnic groups were Sunni Muslims, Christians, Yazidi, Shia sects (Alawites and Ismaili), Druze, Armenians, Assyrians, and Kurds (Ma'oz, & Yaniv, 2014, 12). According to the French census that was conducted in 1921-1922, Syria's total population was 3.5 million people (McHugo, J. 2015, 111-112). The population makeup was 69 percent Sunni Muslims, 16 percent heterodox Muslims (Alawites, Druze, and Ismaili), and 14 percent Christians (Catholics, Maronites, Uniates, and Greek Orthodox) (Rabil, 2006, 9). From the beginning, France exploited Syria's diverse population composition, and pursued a "divide and conquer policy" in order to weaken the country's national unity and maintain its own political authority. France empowered minorities, particularly Alawites, Druze, and Christians, and excluded the Sunni Arab Muslim majority. For example, in 1920, France established Alawites and Druze independent states and granted them full domestic autonomy from the central Syrian government, cultivating the autonomous status of Christian Catholics, Armenians, and Assyrians (Rabil, 2006, 9). They further granted these groups preferential positions in the governmental administration and recruited a large number of soldiers from these sects as well, employing them to crush protests and riots led by Sunni Muslims (Ma'oz, & Yaniv, 2014, 11-15; McHugo, J. 2015, 60).

France's "divide and rule policy" caused a severe social divide, as it did in all of their colonies. French authorities planted seeds of mistrust and discord amongst Syria's ethnoreligious groups and initiated/fueled a series of intergroup clashes. For example, during the 1925 revolt in Damascus, Sunni Muslim rebels attacked Christians who were suspected of collaborating with the French colonial authorities, and in Homs, the local Christian governor was assassinated. Consequently, the French authorities provided

weapons to Christians in Damascus, which intensified the altercation and allowed for the possibility of more violence. Similarly, in 1936, the clashes between Muslims and Christians renewed in Aleppo (Ma'oz, & Yaniv, 2014, 16; see also, McHugo, J. 2015, 47-48).

1.3 - Syria's Political Dynamics in the Post-Independence Period (1946-1970)

The ethnic clashes and ideological differences amongst Syrian elites inherited from the colonial period fostered mistrust and created conflicting civilian and military factions based on ethnic sectarian affiliation and political ideology, thereby weakening the country's national unity. Subsequently, given the socio-political instability in the post-independence period between 1949 and 1970, it is not surprising that Syria witnessed 15 successful military coups and a near civil war between 1976 and 1984 (Stacher, 2011, 197).

In the post-independence era, the main mission for Sunni-led governments was to weaken the territorial autonomy of minorities and reduce the socioeconomic and political strength and privileges they enjoyed under the French protectorate (Ma'oz, & Yaniv, 2014, 21-22). For example, between 1947 and 1949, the communal representation of Christians in parliament was reduced from 19 to 14 delegates, the Alawites from 7 to 4, and the Druze from 5 to 3 delegates. The sole Jewish seat was abolished while the Kurds, Turkomans, and Circassians were lumped in together with the Arab Sunni majority. By 1953, the Adib Shishaqli government passed a bill abolishing the communal political representation system in the parliament (Ma'oz, & Yaniv 2014, 21).

In addition, the Shishaqli government passed laws to end the special jurisdictional rights that the French had granted the Alawites and Druze, thereby making them subject to Syrian national laws while disarming their communities in order to enforce the central government's authority without revolt. They also dismissed Alawites and Druze military officers. Such aggressive measures were met with strong resistance. For instance, in 1946, the government sent a large force to suppress an Alawites uprising led by Suleiman Al-Murshid in Jabal Anssariyya. As a result, rebels were defeated and Al-Murshid was sentenced to death. Additionally, an Alawites Colonel that commanded the Syrian air forces was assassinated. In 1953, a group of Alawites officers led by Mujib Al-Murshid, son of Suleiman Al-Murshid, revolted against the government and attacked its forces. The government responded swiftly and defeated them (Ma'oz, & Yaniv 2014, 22).

Likewise, when Za'im's government sent forces to Jabal Druze to enforce conscription and disarm inhabitants, Druze residents responded by participating in a failed coup against them. The government then ordered the arrest and dismissal of all Druze officers. This action inspired a large revolt in the region in 1954 that was crushed by the Syrian army using tanks and aircraft forces (Ma'oz, & Yaniv 2014, 22).

Overall, while France definitely exploited Syria ethnic-sectarian groups, the subsequent post-independent Syrian leadership cannot be exempt from its complicity in crystalizing the fractured political community and building an enforced national unity that superseded regional and ethnic cleavages. During the French colonization, the aspiration for independence from France fostered nationalism narrative, and thereby temporarily strengthened cooperation and ties between the intergroup elites. However, in

post-independence, nationalism faded gradually, and the country emerged without a clear unifying identity.

1.4 - Power Struggle in the Post-Independence Period– Era of Military Coups

In post-independence Syria, the political leadership failed to respond to the masses' calls for sociopolitical change, particularly, that of workers and peasants. The urban political elites and landowners who dominated the parliament and government preferred the status quo and opposed any change. However, the military officers who were largely from the lower and middle classes shared the social grievances of their classes and were frustrated about the incompetence of the conservative political leaders (Ma'oz, & Yaniv 2014, 17; McHugo, J. 2015, 115, 116). Military officers were active members in political parties, possessed social consciousness, and were motivated to grab power and assume control to change the status quo. As a result, the military emerged as the strongest authority following the 1949 military coup and after Shishaqli's removal from power in 1954 (Ma'oz, & Yaniv 2014, 18, see also Rabil, 2006, 23).

The abolition of the communal political representation and subsequent crackdown on the political power of minorities encouraged the new generation of Alawites and Druze civilians and military officers to integrate into Syria's political life and join political parties in new ways. In particular, the heterogeneous/secular Arab Socialist Resurrection Party (Ba'ath) that was established in 1940 saw increased and diversified membership (Ma'oz, 2014, & Yaniv, 23). Alawites and Druze membership in the Ba'ath party enabled them to ascend to the most senior positions in the military and government (Ma'oz, 2014, & Yaniv, 23). Following the 1954, 1963, and 1966 military coups, Ba'ath

party members, especially upper level military officers, had the upper hand in the army which created the opportunity to remove conservative senior military opponents and replace them with Ba'ath officers. Among the promoted officers were a significant number from Druze and Alawites minorities. For instance, Alawites officers Mohamed Hasan Nasir commanded the Syrian air forces in 1950, followed by Aziz Abd Al-Karim in 1952. Likewise, Druze officers like Amin Abu Assaf and Fadl Allah Abu Mansour were in various senior positions. Both were actively involved in coups that overthrew Za'im and Shishaqli's governments. Between 1949 and 1966, the Sunni Muslim cadre of senior military officers was shattered and replaced with young Alawites and Druze officers. Moreover, by the end of 1964, the Alawites and Druze had completely taken over the leadership of the Ba'ath party, overthrowing senior leaders such as Salah Al-Dine Al-Bitar, and Michel Aflaq (Ma'oz, & Yaniv, 2014, 24).

Alawites and Druze officials in the military and government retained a strong affinity for their communities, hiring and promoting individuals from them, socializing and identifying with them, and relying on their support whenever conflicts and power struggles erupted (Ma'oz, & Yaniv, 2014, 23). Sectarian identities played an important role in Syria's military coups. For example, in 1963, Alawites and Druze officers formed the backbone of the military coup, and in the February 1966 *coup d'état*, Alawites officers headed by the Chief of Staff, Salah Jedid, aligned with Druze officers headed by General Fahad Al-Sha'ir to overthrow the Sunni Muslim president Amin Al-Hafiz. Nonetheless, the cooperation between both groups ended with the post 1966 coup. Once Druze officers, led by Salim Hatum, chief of the Syrian army's commando unit, demanded a larger share of power, the larger factions of Alawites officers led by Salah

Jedid, Chief of Staff, and Hafez Assad, commander of the air force, responded by consolidating control over key positions in the army and the Ba'ath party. Ultimately, they were able to defeat the Druze faction and dismissed a large number of officers, removing them from key positions in the army. Salim Hatum was executed in 1967 (Ma'oz, & Yaniv, 2014, 24-25).

1.5 - Assad Dynasty – Rise of Hafez Assad

Hafez Assad was an Alawites Commander in the Syrian Air Force. He played an important role in the 1963 and 1966 coup successes. In the post-1966 coup, he was promoted to Minister of Defense, which enabled him to build a strong network of support within the military, and gradually he emerged as the second most powerful figure in Syria, behind the leader of the coup, Chief of Staff, Salah Jedid. However, after the humiliating defeat of the Syrian army in the 1967 Six Day War against Israel, Assad faced strong criticism within the military and Ba'ath party. Jedid led these criticisms behind the scenes. Following this period, the two Alawites officers entered into a leadership contest, which ended with Assad's victory in the November 1970 bloodless military coup memorialized as the "Corrective Movement" (Ma'oz, & Yaniv, 2014, 25; Rabil, 2006, 29; see also McHugo, J. 2015).

During the 1963 and 1966 military coups, Alawites officers governed behind the scenes and used Sunni Muslim elites as a *façade* to occupy the presidency, prime ministership, and ministerial portfolios in order to avoid social upheavals from the Arab Sunni majority population, which would have resulted from clear Alawites leadership. This changed after Assad ascended to power, proclaiming himself president of the

republic, granting himself extensive executive, legislative, and military powers in the 1973 constitution, and consolidating his power as the first president from a minority group in modern Syrian history (Ma'oz, & Yaniv, 2014, 26-27).

Through the constitution, Assad established a highly centralized presidential regime and dubbed himself the “supreme leader of the army and armed forces” (article 103), taking sole responsibility for the nomination and dismissal of vice-presidents, the president of the Council of Ministers, ministers, and assistants (article 85). He also took sole authority for the promulgation of laws passed by the Council of People and conferred upon himself the right to oppose those laws by a reasonable resolution (98), as well as “dissolve the council by a justified resolution he promulgates” (107), and “exercise the legislative authority during periods of prorogation in the intervals between ... two councils” (111) (Ma'oz, 2014, & Yaniv, 26-27).

Overall, Assad bestowed on himself substantial powers that granted him full, uncontested control over the country. He exerted his powers on the parliament, government and military, through presidential advisors and an unofficial inner circle of entrusted individuals called the Jama'a (company), whose main mission was to execute presidential orders, safeguard the regime against its enemies, exercise control in the country, and protect the regime's strategic institutions. These institutions included the presidential palace, the television and radio building, and airports (Ma'oz, & Yaniv, 2014, 27). The inner Assad regime was based on a nexus between mostly the Alawites officers, the Ba'ath party leadership, and loyalists from other groups (Rabil, 2006, 29).

Most importantly, the 1969 constitution requires that the president of the republic must be Muslim. However, the Alawites were not recognized as a Muslim group until

Assad successfully persuaded the leader of the Shia in Lebanon, the late Imam Musa Al-Sadr, to certify that the Alawites are Shia Muslims. This allowed Assad to identify himself with the religion of the majority of the population, and to legitimize his authority in accordance with the constitution. He established his public image as a faithful Muslim by attending religious ceremonies and prayers in mosques, honoured Sunni religious leaders ('Ulama), raised their salaries, and appointed the head of the 'Ulama to the Minister of Waqf in government (Ma'oz, & Yaniv, 2014, 30; McHugo, J. 2015, 117).

Unlike the Jedid regime that was completely socialist and secular, the Assad regime adopted a moderate religio-political stand to appease the Sunni Muslim majority especially conservative religious leaders. For instance, the 1971 constitution replaced the president's oath upon assuming office from the secular format of "I swear by my honour and faith" with a religious one: "I swear by God the greatest." (Ma'oz, & Yaniv, 2014, 30). Assad also built support for his regime through the dissemination of propaganda through media channels. His primary message was cultivating an altruistic self-image of a supreme leader; he was depicted in the media as "the leader of the nation's march," the "father," the "first teacher," the "leader forever," the "man of the people," and the "gallant knight" in reference to Salah al-Din al-Ayubi who is memorialized as having wrested Jerusalem from the hands of Crusaders in 1187 (Rabil, 2006, 32). Also, in order to transcend sectarian differences, enforce the legitimacy of his regime and win the support of all groups including Sunnis, Assad promoted the Arab pan rhetoric and confronting Israel (Rabil, 2006, 28).

Nonetheless, in spite the constitutional change and political rhetoric, the Assad regime still faced strong opposition from Arab Sunni Muslims who denounced Ba'athist

“secularism and sectarianism” and organized a series of riots between the 1970s and 1980s resulting in the assassinations of Alawites military officers and Ba’ath government officials (Ma’oz, & Yaniv, 2014, 32). In 1982, a large group of “Muslim Brotherhood” dissidents led an armed rebellion and seized the city of Hama. In response, Assad deployed an elite military unit led by his brother Rif’at Assad to suppress the uprising. The unit used excessive force measures to suppress the revolt and deter the regime’s opponents from organizing future revolts. The campaign destroyed a large portion of Hama city and killed thousands of civilians (Joseph, 2012, 154; see also McHugo, J. 2015, 155,156).

Overall, despite the opposition that Assad faced in the late 1970s and early 80s particularly, by the “Muslim Brotherhood”, his regime was the longest in power in Syria since the country’s independence in 1946. He remained in power from 1970 until his death in 10 June 2000.

1.6 - The Inauguration of Bashar Assad

From the early years of his rule, Hafez Assad attempted to create a hereditary political regime, promoting his brother Rif’at Assad to vice president in 1984. This plan ultimately failed as the political ambition of Rif’at inspired him to plot a failed military coup against his brother (Stacher, 2011, 202). Hafez ultimately excluded him after the coup, forcing him into exile, and shifted his attention to grooming his eldest son, Basel, as the regime’s heir instead.

Basel Assad did not have a prominent political presence. He was a young military Captain with little to no political experience that required that his father initiate a

countrywide campaign to promote his public presence and portfolio. For instance, he was depicted with his father in portraits affixed to the vehicles of the security forces, and the state media bestowed on him the name of “the Golden Captain” (Hinnebusch, 1993, 3-4). However, his sudden death in a mysterious car accident in January 1994 was followed by the promotion of Hafez’s second son, Bashar Assad, an ophthalmologist by training, to be the entrusted heir of the regime (Stacher, 2011, 205).

The death of Basel Assad contributed to the deterioration of his father’s health and substantially decreased his public activities. Eyal Zisser (2007,1) notes that between 1994 and 2000, Hafez delivered only two public speeches (as cited in Stacher, 2011, 207). On June 10, 2000, Assad’s death was declared after nearly 30 years at the helm of one of the Middle East’s most brutal authoritarian regimes. As a result, the regime’s elites unanimously accepted Bashar Assad’s succession. Jim Quilty (2000) states that the regime’s elites began “Bashar’s succession rituals before Hafez was even in the ground” (as cited in Stacher, 2011, 205).

The day that Hafez Assad’s death was announced, the parliament convened to mourn the deceased president and glorify his reign. Meanwhile, the assembly unanimously voted in favor of amending article 83 of the republic’s constitution to lower the eligibility age for presidency from 40 years to 34 years to accommodate Bashar Assad’s succession. On the same day, the Ba’ath party’s Regional Command nominated Bashar for president, and the vice president and interim president Abd Al-Halim Khaddam promoted him to the position of the armed forces’ “Commander in Chief” based on the military’s directives the next day. Also, during the Ba’ath party’s congress

held June 17-20, Bashar was elected as the Secretary General of the party, naming him the “leader of the party and people” (Stacher, 2011, 206).

On June 26, 2000, the parliament formally nominated Bashar Assad for president, and called for a national referendum on July 10, 2000 to vote on his nomination. Given the lack of freedoms and the firm control of the security forces, it can hardly be said that the vote was free or legitimate, despite being presented this way. Ultimately, Bashar received 97.2 percent of the total vote and within a week, on July 17, he was inaugurated as the president of the Syrian Arab Republic (Stacher, 2011, 206).

The successful hereditary succession of Bashar set a precedent for other autocratic Arab republics, validating what were then rumors that Saddam Hussein, Hosni Mubarak, Mu’amar Qaddafi, and Ali Saleh were pursuing the same scenario. The succession of Bashar through internal arrangements amongst the regime’s elites was presented as a necessity to secure stability. However, it denied Syrian people the right to choose their head of state through free and transparent elections, causing a high level of dissatisfaction within Syria and throughout the region. The Egyptian intellectual Sa’ad Eddine Ibrahim coined the term, “*Jamlikaya*,” combining the Arabic words for “republic”, and “monarchy” to depict the event and condemn it (Stacher, 2011, 198).

Bashar Assad inherited a regime that lacked national legitimacy and was at odds with its regional neighbors and Western powers. Syria was isolated in the international community due especially to Assad’s foreign policy in Lebanon and constant tension with Israel, as well as most Arab autocracies in the region (Polk, 2013; BBC, 2018b). Its economy was stagnating due to Western economic sanctions along with the failure of the state-oriented socialist economic model, a lack of private capital, rampant corruption, and

a severe lack of logistical infrastructure and technology (Rabil, 2006, 30-80; Hinnebusch, 1993, 3-9). As Eyal Zisser (2000) noted in his book, *Will Bashar al-Assad Last?* Hafez Assad had, “left his son a country in a total decline” (as cited in Stacher, 2011, 203).

In the first year of his presidency, Bashar Assad was depicted as an educated doctor who lived in London, England and promoted himself as a progressive reformer in order to rejuvenate the legitimacy of his inherited regime, to gain the support of the opposition in Syria and in exile, and to persuade Western powers, especially the US, France, and Britain to end economic sanctions (BBC, 2016). Subsequently, in November 2000, Assad ordered the release of 600 prisoners and in April 2001, he pardoned the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, enabling its leadership and affiliates to return to political life after a ban of 20 years. Similarly, in June 2001, he ordered the evacuation of Syrian military troops from the Lebanese capital of Beirut to continue to appease external powers (BBC, 2016).

Nevertheless, Bashar Assad’s attempt to mend relations with the West was doomed due to the context of the 9/11 attacks in 2001, and the subsequent hostility of the West to Arab nations. Additionally, Syria was embroiled in ongoing conflicts with Western ally, Israel over the Golan Heights that his father’s regime lost during the Six Day War in 1967. In 2002, the Bush administration included Syria in the “Axis of Evil” and in 2004 the US Congress passed the Syria *Accountability Act* that imposed tougher economic sanctions on Syria for supporting and harboring terrorism (Polk, 2013). Therefore, inevitably seeing little opportunity to bring about change, these factors may have caused Bashar to fall under the influence of the regime’s old guard, choosing to pursue his father’s authoritarian governing style in both domestic and foreign affairs. He

maintained the state of emergency that had been imposed since the 1963 military coup and ended the detente phase with the West, particularly the United States after its invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Polk, 2013).

Economically, Bashar Assad inherited a rentier state that lacked a communication infrastructure, private banks, technological advancement, and private capital. Therefore, in the first decade of his presidency, he pursued market-oriented reform policies that allowed for the creation of private banks, reduced restrictions on imports and exports, welcomed foreign investment particularly in telecommunications, as he signed an important free trade agreement with Turkey in 2007, and then he alleviated state subsidies (Butter, 2015, 7-10). Private banks began operating by the mid 2000s, and by 2011, they accounted for 27 percent of total banking assets in Syria reaching \$40 billion. Damascus Securities Exchange (DSE) started operating in 2009 and mobile phone services commenced in 2002 via two holders of build-operate-transfer (OPT) contracts (Butter, 2015, 7).

Assad's economic reform policy led to two major outcomes. First, it benefited the business elites such as merchants and factory owners; most notably, those who had extended family ties with political elites like Rami Makhlouf (Bashar's cousin). Such individuals were able to build major businesses in Syria that enjoyed absolute monopolies on several economic sectors, notably, state procurements (Butter, 2015, 8). Second, the rapid economic reforms worsened the living standards of the middle and lower income classes due to the rise of inflation rate from minus 3 percent (deflation) in 2000, to 3 percent in 2010 (IMF, 2010). This is especially the case due to the cancellation of state subsidies for basic goods after 2005, which created part of the basis for the public

resentment and grievances that manifested in anti-government protests in 2011 (De Chatel, 2014, 521; Butter, 2015, 10,11).

Between 2001, and 2009, the Syrian economy maintained 5 percent as an average annual growth. However, the country was still unable to meet the needs of its population that was increasing by 2.4 percent (Mehchy and Mahdi Doko, 2010, 1). In 2009, about 60 percent of Syria's population was aged 24 years or younger, which therefore put additional pressure on the government in terms of providing employment opportunities, housing, and training/educational opportunities (Mehchy and Mahdi Doko, 2010, 1).

Additionally, climate change played a major role in the deterioration of the life standards of Syrians, particularly in rural regions. Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita rose, on average, between 2000 and 2010 from \$1202.89 to \$2806.89 (IMF, 2010). However, during the years of drought 2006, 2008, and 2009, it fell drastically from \$2557 in 2006 to \$1726 US in 2008 and 2009 (IMF, 2010).

1.7 - Climate Change and Conflict in Syria

A combination of factors contributed directly to the deterioration of socioeconomic conditions leading up to the 2011 demonstrations for a large segment of Syrian society. These contentious issues included a bad drought that had affected Syria since 2006, a scarcity of fresh water due to dam building and irrigated agriculture systems by regional neighbors along the country's main rivers, Tigris, Euphrates, Orontes, and Yarmouk, the mismanagement of fresh water reserves, and rapid liberalization of agriculture sector (Gleick, 2014, 331-332; De Chatel, 2014, 522). Over the past century (from 1900-2005) Syria experienced six droughts, five of which lasted

one season and the sixth lasting two seasons (Mohtadi, 2013, as cited in Gleick, 2014, 332; De Chatel, 2014, 523; see also Kelly et al., 2015, 2-3). However between 2006 and 2011, Syria experienced extreme droughts lasting several seasons and even years, which led to crop failures, farmers' financial difficulties, economic dislocation, and mass migration to urban regions (Worth, 2010, as cited in Gleick, 2014, 332-333). Between 2006 and 2010, about 1.3 million people in Eastern Syria were affected by agriculture failures, with an estimated 800,000 people losing their livelihood and basic food supports (De Chatel, 2014, 525). An additional 200,000 people abandoned their lands, according to the Center for Climate and Security (Polk, 2013). During the same period, yields of wheat and barley decreased by 47 percent and 67 percent respectively and livestock populations crashed (ACSAD, 2011, as cited in Gleick, 2014, 334). Moreover, in some regions, crop failure reached 75 percent, and livestock losses were 85 percent (Polk, 2013). Gary Nabhan (2013) described the 2006-2011-drought period as the "worst long-term drought and most severe set of crop failures since agriculture civilization began in the Fertile Crescent many millennia ago" (as cited in Gleick, 2014, 332).

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) senior staff member in Syria, Abdullah bin Yehia, described the impact of the drought as a "perfect storm" and warned in November 2008 that Syria was vulnerable and would face "social destruction" as a result (Polk, 2013; Gleick, 2014, 334). Eventually, between 2 to 3 million of Syria's 10 million rural people were reduced to "extreme poverty" (Polk, 2013). In fact, in 2010, the UN estimated that 3.7 million Syrians, which represented 17 percent of the total population, were food insecure (De Chatel, 2014, 525). As a result, more than 1.5 million inhabitants of rural regions – mostly unskilled agricultural workers – migrated to the

major urban cities of Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Hama, Daraa, and Deir ez-Zour seeking jobs and housing, thereby adding to pre-existing socioeconomic challenges to the urban regional infrastructure (Kelly et al., 2015, 2). In fact, in 2009, the UN-OCHA estimated that between 60% and 70% of villages in the governorates of Al-Hasakah, and Deir ez-Zor had been deserted. Thus, In 2010, the UN-OCHA estimated also that more than 65.000 families, or about 300.000 people, migrated from rural affected regions to urban regions to settle and expand existing tent camps such as Mzeirieb camp near Daraa (all cited in De Chatel, 2014, 527). Ironically, Daraa was the birthplace of the anti-government protests in 2011.

In short, the shared sense of socioeconomic grievances due to the failure of rushed economic reform measures, international economic sanctions, consecutive years of drought, high rates of unemployment, widespread systematic corruption in the state's institutions, a lack of legal guarantees and human rights protections under the state of emergency, and mismanagement of the socioeconomic effects of the drought crisis contributed collectively to social unrest and created the basis of economic and political uncertainty. Saleeby (2012), an author in the Arab Studies Institute argues that, "the regime's failure to put in place economic measures to alleviate the effects of drought was a critical driver in propelling such massive mobilization of dissent" (as cited in Gleick, 2014, 335). Ultimately, the successful regime change in Tunisia and Egypt, and dissatisfaction of youth Syrians about the pace of socioeconomic and political reforms initiated nationwide protests in March 2011. Thus, climate change played the role of "threat multiplier" by fostering the public resentment towards the Assad regime (De Chatel, 2014, 524).

1.8 - Arab Spring Uprising – A Desperate Call for Reform and Socioeconomic Justice

Social conflicts do not erupt suddenly; in fact, they are social symptoms and outcomes of various societal factors and ills (Simmons, 2011, 118). The Arab Spring uprising was a spontaneous response of the masses to corruption, oppression, political violence, and economic stagnation that had characterized the autocratic Arab regimes of the MENA since the decolonization era in the 1950s.

Starting in Tunisia in December 2010, the protests that engulfed the autocratic Arab countries of the MENA were peacefully led by educated Arab youth known in Egypt as *shabab al-ahawe*, “coffee-shop guys,” in Algeria as the *hittistes*, “those who lean with their backs against the wall,” and in Morocco as *diplômés chômeurs*, “graduate-jobless” (The Economist, 2016). In 2010, Arab youth aged 15-24 represented 20 percent of the Arab countries’ 357 million total population and were disproportionately affected by the economic ills in their respective countries (The Economist, 2016). According to the 2013 UN Human Development Report, Arab countries, except for the oil exporters, were ranked at the lowest levels of the Human Development Index. For example, Yemen ranked 160 internationally among 187 countries, while Egypt was 112, Morocco was 130, Tunisia was 94, and Syria was 116 on the list (UN Human Development Report 2013, 15). In the early days of the uprisings and before the blood of many activists was shed by their dictatorial regimes, protesters called for socioeconomic justice and political reform. It wasn’t until the brutality of the security forces against activists escalated the protests nationwide that protesters’ demands transformed from calls for reform within regimes to calls for structural changes. Youth could illustratively be found chanting the

popular motto, “*Ash-sha‘b yurīd isqāṭ an-nizām,*” which means that, “the people want to bring down the regime” (Reuters, 2011).

1.9 - Anti-Assad Protests: From a Call for Reform to Regime Change

The collapse of Ben Ali’s regime in Tunisia on 14 January 2011, Hosni Mubarak’s in Egypt on February 11, 2011, and Muammar Qaddafi’s in Libya on October 20, 2011, inspired and encouraged Syrians who had lived under the state of emergency since 1963 (Rabil, 2006, 29). They descended on public squares and main streets to demand social justice and freedom, to condemn corruption, the widespread abuse of power, and human rights violations. In March 2011, Syrian protesters in Damascus held a “Day of Dignity” to demand the release of political prisoners, and a “Day of Rage” in the Southern city of Daraa to condemn the brutality of the security forces towards civilian protesters (The Washington Post, 2014). Consequently, the Assad security forces retaliated aggressively against protesters, firing indiscriminately on them and detaining thousands of activists including children (Amnesty International, 2017). In May 2011, Assad deployed army tanks to Daraa, Banyas, Homs, and the suburbs of Damascus, starting the bombardment of regions that organized anti-Assad protests (BBC, 2016).

Such actions were not discontinuous with Syrian history. The Assad regime has a long history of counter insurgencies against its civilian population. The regime’s security forces have always used extreme security measures to suppress riots and anti-government protests, and silence the political opposition. However, in 2011, the old guard of the Assad regime did not realize that something had changed, believing that their previous successes in suppressing the population through violence would work again. Assad’s

aggressive military campaign to crackdown on the rebels led to widespread violence and unrest across the country. Thus, the United Nations, the Arab League, international powers, and Syria's neighboring states called upon Assad to halt the military operations, and initiate a political dialogue with the opposition to discuss the mechanisms of a peaceful transition of power. Regardless, the regime persisted in its brutal strategy and all of the diplomatic international interventions failed (Donnelly, 2013; Lombardo, 2015, 1193; BBC, 2012).

Therefore, in November 2011, the Arab League voted in favor of suspending Syria's seat within the organization due to its failure to implement the organization's peace plan. Also, in November 2012, the political opposition in exile formed the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition forces in Qatar. Within a month, the anti-Assad countries, namely the US, France, Britain, Turkey, and the Gulf countries recognized the National Coalition as a "legitimate representative" of the Syrian people (BBC, 2016).

1.10 - Syria's Civil War-The Shift from Protests to Armed Struggle

Despite the nature of a conflict, its dynamics and outcomes are predetermined, to a large extent, by the adopted conflict styles of the conflict counterparts, their attitudes, and the role of third party intervention (Reimer et al., 2015, 64-65). The withdrawal conflict style of Ben Ali in Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt de-escalated the conflicts in their respective countries, and led relatively to successful regime changes. Whereas, the competitive conflict styles of Muammar Qaddafi in Libya and Bashar

Assad in Syria escalated the confrontations with protesters and caused them to develop into large-scale civil wars.

Bashar Assad refused to recognize the rebels' demands, and labeled them as "traitors" and "terrorists" who conspired with Syria's external enemies to destabilize the country and undermine its national security. He vowed to crush them and restore the state's control (BBC, 2017). The intensity of the pro-Assad forces' offensive attacks on anti-Assad regions led to the formation of militant groups and, in early 2012, with the involvement of external regional and international powers, the conflict transformed into a large-scale sectarian civil war (Rodenhäuse, 2012, 264-266; Polk, 2013).

A key factor in the intensification and protracted nature of the ongoing conflict in Syria has been the destructive intervention of regional and international powers. The external political, military, and financial support provided by Russia and Iran to Assad, and by the Western powers, Turkey, and the Gulf countries to the opposition turned Syria into a proxy battleground, fostered sectarianism, hardened positions, and tore communities apart (BBC, 2017).

1.11 - The Human Cost of Syria's Civil War

The escalation and prolongation of the unfolded conflict has created a humanitarian catastrophe of global magnitude. The inquiry reports of the UN human rights agencies and Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), as well as newspapers reports indicate that the warring parties in Syria, particularly the Assad regime and its external allies, and terrorist organizations (namely ISIS and Al Qaeda subsidiary Jabhat Al-Nusra) have repeatedly and systematically committed acts of violence that fall under

genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, defying international law and denying universal human rights. Such acts include indiscriminate attacks on civilians, use of prohibited chemical substances, besieging of civilians, arbitrary arrest, torture, and the killing of detainees in custody.

1.11.1 - Pro-Assad Forces Indiscriminate Attacks

Since the eruption of the anti-Assad protests in 2011, the Assad government forces persisted in conducting indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian sites, such as markets, schools, residential neighborhoods, and hospitals. Due to the imbalance of power between the pro-government forces and the rebels, the government has ultimate supremacy over Syria's skies, which enables it to carry out devastating attacks on civilian sites via the Syrian Air Force.

The barrel bomb is amongst the deadliest weapons that the government Air Force uses against civilians in the anti-Assad regions. By February 22, 2015, aerial barrel bombs killed 6163 civilians in Syria, including 1892 children, and have damaged at least 450 sites (Human Rights Watch, 2016). The Assad regime uses barrel bombs against civilian targets in defiance of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2139 that was passed on February 22, 2014 (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

Between the passage of the UN Security Council Resolution 2139 in February 2014 and January 2015, the pro-Assad forces attacked at least 450 sites with barrel bombs in clear defiance of UN resolutions and repeated calls of its officials to stop the use of barrel bombs (Human Rights Watch, 2016). The Commissioner of the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria, Carla Del Ponte, stated in a March 14, 2017 report,

“Our investigation did not find any indication that there was a military target in the schools or their vicinity. This attack constitutes a war crime...it is imperative that the perpetrators are brought to justice” (un Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2017). Moreover, Amnesty International’s reports on Syria assert that the pro-Assad forces are pursuing a systematic extermination policy against anti-Assad activists, journalists, and medical workers (Amnesty International report, 2017).

1.11.2 - Use of Chemical Weapons

On July 23, 2012, the Syrian Foreign Ministry spokesperson confirmed for the first time that his country possesses chemical weapons alleging that the stockpile would not be used against Syrian people, but it would only be utilized to deter external aggressors. This declaration was alarming to the international community, and in less than a month, on August 20, 2012, the former US President, Barak Obama drew his red line regarding the use of chemical weapons in Syria (Arms Control Association, 2018). Despite international condemnation since late 2012, dozens of chemical weapons attacks have taken place in Syria resulting in severe injuries and the deaths of thousands of Syrian civilians and dissidents. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and Western governments have accused pro-Assad forces of launching attacks with chemical weapons on civilians and rebels. On June 4, 2013, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius asserted that there was “no doubt” that the Syrian regime had used sarin gas in multiple cases (Arms Control Association, 2017). However, Assad, backed by Russia, Iran, and China has denied the charge and accused rebel groups of carrying out the attacks (BBC, 2018).

As a result of the US and its Western allies threatening to intervene militarily in Syria against Assad, on September 9, 2013, Russian foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov announced that the Assad regime would surrender and dismantle its chemical weapons stockpile if the US agreed to halt its military strike. Within four days, the Syrian foreign minister Walid Moualem welcomed the Russian proposal (The Washington Post, 2013). Nevertheless, attacks with chemical weapons continued such as the Khan Cheikhoun's attack on civilians on April 4, 2017 causing worldwide outrage (Aljazeera, 2017) and the latest attack on Douma on April 7, 2018 (BBC, 2018).

Despite the assertions of the international community that pro-Assad forces have deliberately used chemical weapons against civilians and rebels, Russia considered the US reciprocal airstrike to be a violation of Syria's national sovereignty, and international law. Moreover, Russia and Iran pledged to retaliate against the US. in the event that it carried out further attacks against Assad regime.

1.11.3 - Arbitrary Arrest, Torture, and Death in Custody

Article 11 of the Protocol Additional to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, to which Syria is a member states, "the physical or mental health and integrity of persons who are in the power of the adverse Party or who are interned, detained or otherwise deprived of liberty as a result of a situation referred to in Article 1 shall not be endangered by any unjustified act or omission" (Protocol Additional to the Geneva Convention, 1977). Despite these prescriptions, since the eruption of the anti-Assad protests, the Assad security forces have arbitrarily detained hundreds of thousands of political activists, including children, subjecting them to torture, starvation, deprivation of medical care, and

unlawful extermination. Detailed statements of released detainees report the systematic torture and killing of people in government detention centers. Further, activists report that the security forces even detained their family members, such as their parents, spouses, and children to force them to turn themselves into the authorities (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

In August 2013, a military defector, a former military forensic photographer code-named Cesar, smuggled 53,000 horrific pictures out of Syria of tortured, starved and killed detainees. These are now known as the “Cesar pictures.” The pictures show that a significant number of detainees were starved, and had signs of injuries such as burns, bruising, gouged eyes, ligature marks from strangulation, and signs of electrocution (BBC, 2015). The pictures were published for the first time in January 2014 in a report by three war crimes prosecutors commissioned by Qatar and the Syrian Opposition Coalition. They were proven to be authentic (BBC, 2015).

Cesar reported that more than ten thousand detainees had died in Assad detention centers between 2011 and 2013. As the number of corpses surpassed the storing capacity of hospitals, the military forces had started using military sites to dispose of them. For instance, at Hospital 601 in Damascus, the military guards stored the dead bodies in an adjoining warehouse where military vehicles were repaired. The Wall Street Journal called the Assad regime torture policy an “Industrial-Scale Campaign” (The Wall Street Journal, 2014). In statements collected from over 500 survivors of Assad detention centers between March 2011 and November 2015, over 200 interviewees stated that they had witnessed at least one or more deaths in custody. Almost all reported having

experienced and witnessed torture and degrading treatment themselves (UNHRC report, 2016, 5).

According to local activists, in 2015, at least 890 detainees died in custody due to torture, infected injuries caused by torture, and deprivation from medical care. Released detainees who endured and survived torture and cruel treatment at the hands of the Assad security forces stated that detainees preferred to die by rocket or barrel bombs than to be arrested and tortured, namely because victims who were killed by bombardment died instantly. In contrast, detainees would endure a lot of pain for days or months before they eventually died (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

According to a UNHRC report (2016, 5), interrogators and guards in Assad-controlled detention centers employ horrific methods of torture to kill detainees. In 2014, a detainee held in a center under the control of the 4th Division of the Syrian army had his genitals mutilated during torture and was left without medical treatment. Consequently, he died within three days. In addition, a former detainee of a military security branch in Homs reported that he had witnessed an elderly man severely beaten by the guards and hung from the ceiling by his wrists. The guards also burnt his eyes with a cigarette and pierced his body with a heated sharp metal object. As a result, within three hours of hanging in the same position, he died.

The magnitude and severity of the abuses that detainees endured in custody at the hands of the Assad regime's security forces is beyond imagination. Those who survived torture and humiliation carry traumas that will affect their well-being for the rest of their lives especially because they are less likely to disclose abuses they have suffered due to humiliation, stigma, and the inability to process what has happened. Omar, a high school

student when he was arrested, told Amnesty international, “You will struggle to find a former Saydnaya prisoner who will tell you what really happened there, because it is so humiliating.” He added:

I do not know what term to use to describe what I saw. The guard would ask everyone to take off all their clothes and go to the bathroom one by one. As we walked to the bathroom, they would select one of the boys, someone petite or young or fair. They would ask him to stand with his face to the door and close his eyes. They would then ask a bigger prisoner to rape him. No one will admit this happened to them, but it happened so often... sometimes psychological pain is worse than physical pain, and the people who were forced to do this were never the same again (Amnesty International Report, 2017, 7).

Former detainees in the Assad regime detention centers reported that a number of detainees started hallucinating or displaying signs of depression and mental disorders. Afterwards, they stopped eating and drinking, and eventually they died in their cells without identified reasons (UNHRC report, 2016).

On February 3, 2016, the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) released a report on Syria titled, “Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Death in Detention in the Syrian Arab Republic.” The report emphasizes the scale of the torture and the horrifying causes of death in the detention centers controlled by the Assad regime, as well as those controlled by ISIS and the Al-Qaeda subsidiary Jabhat Al-Nusra. According to the report, the highest number of deaths in custody in Syria has occurred in detention centers managed by the Syrian intelligence military services. The highest numbers of fatalities occurred in “the Military Security, including Branches 215 (Raids Company), 227 (Damascus Regional Branch) and 235 (Palestine Branch), as well as the Air Force Intelligence (Investigations) Branch in Mezzeh military airport, and detention facilities under the

control of the General Security Directorate, including Branch 251 (Internal Security Branch in Al Khatib Street)” (UNHRC report, 2016, 4).

Moreover, according to the Human Rights Data Analysis Group, between March 2011 and December 2015, at least 17,723 civilian detainees were killed in detention centers controlled by Assad forces; in other words, an average of 300 people were killed every month (Amnesty International report, 2017, 5). According to activists and former detainees, the worst detention centre in Syria is Saydnaya Military Prison, which holds between 10,000 and 20,000 detainees. The prison is divided into two main detentions centres, a “red building” which contains civilian detainee’s who have been arrested since the outbreak of anti-Assad protests, and the “white building,” which contains officers and soldiers who defected from the regime.

On February 7, 2017, Amnesty International released a report¹ titled, “Saydnaya Prison: Human Slaughterhouse.” The report included a detailed listing of severe human rights violations taking place in the prison that are listed in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) as war crimes and crimes against humanity, including torture, extrajudicial extermination, and sexual violence. The report estimates that between September 2011 and December 2015, between 5,000 and 13,000 people were killed at the Saydnaya Military Prison by torture, severe beating, and mass hanging (Amnesty International report, 2017, p.6).

The killings at the Saydnaya Military Prison mostly take the form of mass hangings. Each week, the listed detainees get condemned to death in “trials” at the

¹ The report’s findings are based on interviewees with 84 individuals: 31 men who were detained at Saydnaya, four former prison guards, three former judges, three doctors who worked at Tishreen Military hospital, four Syrian lawyers, 17 international and national experts on detention in Syria, and 22 family members of current or former detainees at Saydnaya prison.

Military Field Court located in the Al-Qaboun neighbourhood of Damascus. However, before they are hanged they get a severe beating that the guards call “the party.” A former detainee, Sameer, describes the beating he received at Saydnaya prison stating, “The beating was so intense. It was as if you had a nail, and you were trying again and again to beat it into a rock. It was impossible, but they just kept going. I was wishing they would just cut off my legs instead of beating them anymore” (Amnesty International report, 2017, 7).

1.11.4 - Assad Cover-Up Strategy

International humanitarian law and international human rights law put the burden of justifying the cause of death during custody on the state and specifies that all deaths that occur in custody must be investigated by an independent and transparent investigation; thus, failure to conduct such investigations places the responsibility of the state on the death of the victim (UNHRC report, 2016, 3).

Investigators have uncovered that the Assad regime has pursued cover-up measures to conceal the number of deaths in the detention centres controlled by the security forces, thereby denying its responsibility in the deaths of detainees and the abuses they have experienced. For instance, when a detainee dies in custody, the government issues a death certificate to his family showing that he died of a heart attack or that his body was retrieved from a terrorist group, and in some cases, the Assad military forces dumps the corpses in rivers. For example, in January 2013, victims who were confirmed to be in the custody of the Air Force Intelligence Branch in Aleppo were executed and dumped in the Quiet River. It appears that “many of the more than 140

victims had their hands tied behind their backs and appeared to have been executed by gunshot” (Rosin, 2016, parag, 21).

1.11.5 - Assad’s External Allies - Guilty by Association

The Assad regime relies on the military support of multiple external actors, mainly Russia, Iran, Hezbollah, and Shia militias from Iraq and elsewhere that are sponsored by Iran. The Russo-Syrian alliance is one of the longest-lasting strategic alliances in modern history going back to the Cold War era. The Russian government continues to shield the Assad regime politically and militarily from the international community, notably by using the veto power twelve times at the UN Security Council to block the passage of resolutions that were not in favor of the Assad regime. The latest of these instances took place in NYC in April 2018 (RTE, 2018).

Furthermore, in October 2015, Russia intervened militarily in Syria to rescue the Assad regime from near-collapse after he lost a large portion of the country’s territory to ISIS, Jabhat Al-Nusra, the Free Syrian Army, and other rebel/militant groups (BBC, 2015). The Russian President, Vladimir Putin justified his country’s intervention in Syria as part of an international counterterrorism effort and to defeat ISIS. Nevertheless, moderate militant groups such as the Free Syrian Army, Fat’s Army, and other rebel groups reported that the Russian airstrikes targeted them much more than it attacked ISIS and Jabhat Al-Nusra. Moreover, inquiry reports indicate that the Russian airstrikes deliberately attacked civilian sites such as residential areas, schools and hospitals (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

1.12 - Radical-Terrorist Militant Groups' War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity

Extremist-terrorist militant groups such as Jabhat Al-Nusra, and the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIS/Dinesh) have controlled vast regions of Syria's national territory and established autonomous administrations that forced residents to adhere to very strict rules/codes of conduct. In cases of non-compliance, civilians have faced inhumane punishments. Victims have been shot in public, beheaded, crucified, suffered bodily mutilation, raped, and stoned to death (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

International humanitarian law obliges all warring parties, including non-state actors, to respect the human rights of civilians, war prisoners and to carry out violent attacks reasonably (non-combatant immunity). Article 1 of the Protocol Additional to the 1949 Geneva Conventions states. "It is the duty of the Parties to a conflict from the beginning of that conflict to secure the supervision and implementation of the Conventions and of this Protocol by the application of the system of Protection (Protocol Additional to the Geneva Convention, 1977).

Both terrorist organizations have deliberately carried out indiscriminate terrorist attacks against civilians and religious minorities' territories in order to terrorize and force them into submission. On March 31, 2015, ISIS fighters deliberately killed at least 35 civilians when they seized Mab'oujeh village in the Hama countryside. Likewise, on June 15, 2015, ISIS deliberately targeted civilians in the Northern city of Kobani killing between 233 and 262 civilians (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

The most vulnerable people in the terrorists groups' territories are the affiliates of religious minorities such as Yazidis. ISIS considers Yazidis to be infidels and declared its

commitment to destroy them. ISIS defined Yazidis as a, “pagan minority [and stated that...] their women could be enslaved [...] as spoils of war” (UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2016). Consequently, ISIS pursues systematic measures to dismantle the Yazidi community, separating Yazidi men and boys over twelve years old from their families, and killing those who refuse to convert to their distorted version of Islam. Yazidi women and girls are sexually enslaved and are forced to marry ISIS fighters or are sold in slave markets (Souk Sabaya). Some are gifted or willed between fighters. A Yazidi woman told the UN Commission of Inquiry that she had been sold 15 times stating, “It is hard to remember all those who bought me” (UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2016). Yazidi boys older than seven are forcibly removed from their mothers and transferred to ISIS training camps in Syria where they get indoctrinated into radical beliefs, are militarily trained, and recruited as child soldiers. One Yazidi boy was told by his ISIS commander, “Even if you see your father, if he is Yazidi, you must kill him” (UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2016). Thus, on June 2016, the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria concluded that ISIS has committed genocide against Yazidis with the Chair of the Commission, Paul Pinheiro stating conclusively that, “ISIS has subjected every Yazidi woman, child or man that it has captured to the most horrific of atrocities” (UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2016).

International humanitarian law and international human rights law imposes humanitarian obligations on states (and during war, all conflicting parties) to protect all persons within their custody, regardless of their status and nature of the offense they might have been accused of committing. Detainees must be protected from violence and

life-threatening treatment (UNHRC, 2016). However, in the same UNHRC report condemning the human rights atrocities of the Syrian state, the agency stressed that ISIS and Jabhat Al-Nusra have also unlawfully arrested an unknown number of detainees and subjected them to torture, cruel treatment, and summary executions (UNHRC, 2016).

1.13 - Non-Terrorist Militant Groups' Human Rights Atrocities

Inquiry reports of the UN agencies and NGOs indicate that as a result of a state of anarchy in the region even non-terrorist rebel groups have committed serious human rights violations such as indiscriminate attacks on civilians, the abduction of opponents, the imposition of sieges, and using civilians as human shields (Human Rights Watch, 2016). In particular, in the last few years, the Kurdish armed forces have gained control over large territories in northern Syria, established autonomous administrations and have carried out such actions. The Kurdish armed forces known as the People's Protection units (YPG) is at the forefront of the war against terrorism in Syria and Iraq. As such, given this proclaimed mandate, Western governments have typically been less critical of Kurdish human rights violations. Nonetheless, inquiry reports have indicated that the YPG and its allied forces have committed them nonetheless, such as recruiting child soldiers and forcibly displacing Sunni-Arabs from their territories (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

1.14 - Syrian Refugee Crisis: A Humanitarian Crisis with a Global Magnitude

The ongoing conflict in Syria has caused the largest humanitarian crisis since World War II. Today, there are 13.4 million people in need of humanitarian and

protection assistance: nearly 5.6 million people fled Syria, one third of the Syrian population is internally displaced, and more than 6 million people are in need of shelter assistance (UN OCHA, 2017; UN ReliefWeb, 2017). In addition, 30 percent of all patients with war-related injuries are children under 15 years of age; at least 7 million people are food insecure; 12.8 million in Syria are in need of health assistance; 80 percent of the population is without access to safe drinking water; and close to 2 million children are out of school (UN OCHA, 2017; UN ReliefWeb, 2017). Moreover, more than 400,000 people have been killed so far, more than 17,000 have been tortured and killed in the Assad regime's detention centers, and thousands of women and girls have been enslaved and sexually abused by the regime's security personnel, and terrorist groups' militants (UNCHR, 2017; Amnesty International report, 2017; Human Rights Watch report, 2016; Al Jazeera, 2016; BBC, 2015; The Wall Street Journal, 2014; The Washington Post, 2015). In short, Stephen O'Brien, the under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator summed up the humanitarian situation in Syria before the UN Security Council on March 30, 2017 stating that, "In Syria, there is not a man, woman or child from any walk of life who hasn't been impacted by the particular wretchedness of this particularly gruesome and protracted conflict" (UN ReliefWeb, 2017).

Since 2011, the intensity of the ongoing war and the severity of the human rights atrocities forced 5.6 million Syrians to flee their communities to regional neighboring countries, and some even went to Europe and other countries that have engaged in the un resettlement program for Syrian refugees (UNHCR, 2018). Today, the highest number of Syrian refugees is registered in Turkey (3,589, 384 million refugees accounting for 65

percent of Syrian total refugees), followed by Lebanon (986, 942 representing 17 percent), Jordan (666,113), Iraq (249,641), Egypt (128, 956), and North African countries (33,545) (UNHCR, 2018). As of August 31st, 2018, Canada welcomed 58,600 Syrian refugees (Government of Canada, 2018).

1.15 - Conclusion

Syria's modern sociopolitical history in the last century provides sufficient information for understanding the culmination of events and contexts leading to the country's protracted violent conflict. France's "divide and rule" colonial policy in Syria implanted mistrust among the country's communal elites. The inability of the country's leaders in the post-independence period to forge a strong national unity opened the door to a series of military coups and countercoups. Hafez Al-Assad's successful power grab in a bloodless military coup faced strong resistance with the Sunni majority because of his religious minority background as an Alawite, and his pursuit of secularism. Yet, the repressive nature of his regime enabled him to suppress all opposition fronts and remain in power for three decades. The regime's legitimacy deficit escalated with the forced hereditary succession of Bashar Assad and Bashar's failure to hear and address the urgent socioeconomic needs of Syrians. Therefore, a future peace resolution needs to manage Syria's post-colonial ethnopolitical fabric, and socioeconomic profile. It also needs to address the mass trauma and social collapse brought on by the conflict.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 - Introduction

In general, peace research and writings revolve around two main questions: “What is the conflict about?” and “What are the possible solutions?” (Galtung, 2011, 5). Hence, Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) scholarship provides theoretical frameworks that explain the eruption and dynamics of social conflicts, as well as approaches to halt violence and transform those conflicts. Transforming Syria’s conflict to peace requires a holistic-multilevel approach that analyzes and addresses all factors that led to the eruption of anti-Assad protests, and its escalation into a protracted brutal civil conflict. It is worth noting that the theoretical concepts in this chapter parallel the findings in chapters four, five, and six. The concepts and frameworks explain the eruption of ethno-political conflicts and explore the possibilities for transforming them through various peacebuilding and conflict transformation processes.

PACS theories are largely divided into two groups: conflict analysis theories that explain conflict eruption and trajectories, and conflict resolution theories that provide intervention strategies to de-escalate conflicts and transform them. Partially to reflect the disciplinary organization, this chapter is divided into three sections. The first section explains the hidden and apparent factors that caused the eruption and escalation of ethno-political/ethnoterritorial conflicts, namely, social cubism (Byrne, & Carter, 1996; also see Byrne & Keashly, 2000, 99-103; Byrne, Carter & Senehi, 2003; Byrne & Nadan, 2013), basic human needs (Burton, 1990; Fisher 1997; Azar, 1986; Kelman, 2011), collective identity (Korostelina, 2011; Rothbart & Cherubin, 2011; Rothman, 1997;

Rothman & Olson, 2001; Rothbart & Korostelina, 2011), and structural violence (Galtung & Hoivik, 1971; Galtung, 1975, 1996).

The second section discusses the peacebuilding processes: both the (neo) liberal, and emancipatory peacebuilding paradigms (Hyde & Byrne, 2015; Mac Ginty, Muldoon, & Ferguson, 2007; Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013; Lederach, 1995; Lederach, 1997; Pugh, 2011; Richmond, 2014; Byrne, & Keashly, 2000, Paffenholz, 2014). Also, conflict resolution in violence-torn societies will be explored through the role of external guarantors (Byrne, 1995; Byrne, 2000; Byrne, 2007; Byrne & Keashly, 2000; Kriesberg, 2011) and diaspora activism (Demmers, 2002, 86-89; Paul, 2000, 24-26; Koinova, 2011, 348-351; Cochrane, Baser, & Swain, 2009, 684-700).

Finally, the third section builds on the second and examines conflict transformation through reconciliation, transitional justice, peace education, storytelling, and Indigenous/traditional peace process theories (Barsky, 2011; Byrne, Thiessen & Fissuh, 2011; Keating & Knight, 2004, Lederach, 1996, 1997; Bar-Tal, Rosen & Nets-Zehgut, 2009; Salomon & Cairns, 2009; Senehi, 2010).

2.2 - Causes of Conflict

2.2.1 - Social Cubism

Resolving and transforming identity-based conflicts requires a holistic approach at the conflict analysis stage, which distances itself from superficiality and/or a monocausal approach, but examines all material and psychological factors that led to conflict eruption (Byrne, Carter & Senehi, 2002, 730). Mac Ginty (2006, 85) asserts in the “Critical Peace Assessment” chapter in his book, *No War, No Peace* that political

conflicts are the outcome of various factors, which thereby, demands a comprehensive analytical framework that reviews a wide range of conflict-contributing factors. Therefore, Mac Ginty (2006, 86) puts forward five principles for conflict analysis/assessment: 1) Conflict has multiple causes. 2) The importance of interaction effects. 3) Prioritize conflict causation factors. 4) Flexible methodologies are required to take account of local circumstances. 5) Analyses need to be aware of both direct and indirect violence. Further, Mac Ginty's (2006, 81) Critical Assessment Peace approach necessitates the collaboration between internal and external actors in a peace process to identify the conflict causes and develop peace approaches to address them. Accordingly, this study gives Syrian refugees the opportunity to define peace, what constitute a sustainable peace, and how to transform conflict and relationships.

In a similar multi-vocal vein, Sean Byrne and Neal Carter's (1996) "Social Cubism Model" asserts that ethno-political and ethno-national conflicts are the outcomes of six interconnected factors: history, religion, demographics, political institutional and non-institutional behavior, economics, and psycho-cultural mechanisms (Byrne & Carter 2002, 742; also see Byrne & Keashly, 2000, 99-103; Byrne & Senehi, 2012; Byrne, Carter & Senehi, 2002). It is an "interactive and diagnostic analytical model" that examines the interaction and interrelation between the six facets on trajectories of ethnoterritorial conflicts (Byrne & Nadan, 2013, 61).

Walker Connor (1994) argues that the "[six] factors are typically studied as independent causes, failing to produce adequate explanations" (as cited in Byrne & Carter, 2002, 743). Mac Ginty (2006, 86) uses the term "interaction effect" to refer to the vital role of interplay between causes in conflict eruption. He states, "The mere existence

of multiple conflict causation factors is insufficient to trigger (violent) conflict.” Therefore, when analyzing a conflict, the six factors should be regarded and examined as “one unit of analysis” with multiple layers/factors because they are interrelated and constantly interacting, producing patterns of intergroup behavior, which thereby determines the conflict dynamics and outcomes (Byrne & Carter, 2002, 743-744). In other words, the six factors are like a Rubic’s Cube as “each side is not only in contact and relationship with four other contiguous side simultaneously, but rather, parts of each side may move, and serve as catalyst for other factors and sub-factors or facets” (McKay, 2002, 885).

Syria’s conflict started in 2011 as a manifestation of public resentment, particularly, from youth (demographics) towards the Assad regime’s failure to address socioeconomic inequalities (economics), promote economic growth, tackle corruption, ensure the rule of law, and safeguard human rights (political institutional and non-institutional behavior). One of the potential underlying causes of the conflict included the rejection of the majority Sunni Muslims by the ruling Alawites minority (demographics and identity). Moreover, the deployment of army tanks against peaceful civilian protesters revived the protesters’ memories of the Assad regime’s atrocities in Hama in 1982 (history and psychoculture), which thereby, escalated the conflict and changed the conflict counterparts’ behavior against each other. Since conflicts are not static, Syria’s conflict changed overtime from a social movement (political conflict) into a sectarian civil war. That shift is also attributed to sectarian rivalry as a result of geopolitical competition between Iran that claims to be the protector of Shia in the world and Saudi Arabia that claims to be the custodian of Sunnis in the global milieu. In addition,

geopolitics and international rivalry for sphere of influence, especially between the US and Russia contributed to conflict protraction and deterioration. Therefore, geopolitics (international politics) plays a primary role in de-escalation of intrastate conflicts.

2.2.2 - Collective Identity

Identity is a central unit of analysis in social conflicts due to its instrumental role in mobilizing in-group members, instigating conflicts, and escalating them. Humans are social beings; therefore, subscribing to an identity, or identifying with a distinct group is a part of the human social and cultural fabric. Korostelina (2011, 101-102) argues that even in seemingly homogenous societies, individuals tend to develop loyalties to smaller-local groups such as a religious or civil society organizations, a club/association, or a region.

Theorists make a distinction between individual identity that refers to individual perception and description of oneself as a unique person, and collective identity that refers to one self's image that derives from a group membership (Stets & Burke, 2000 as cited in Cook-Huffman, 2011, 20). Primordialist scholars like Pierre van den Berghe (1981), Anthony Smith (1981), Donald Horwitz (1985), and Samuel Huntington (1996) define identity as the "final outcome of history, culture, and genetics" (all cited in Ghais, 2018, 25). However, instrumentalist scholars like Immanuel Wallerstein, (1979), Charles Tilly (1978), Eric Hobsbawm (1992), and Susan Olzak (1992) argue that individuals and groups are self-driven to serve their material and political interests; thus, identity is used as a vehicle/instrument to attain those interests (all cited in Ghais, 2018, 26).

Identity is a key factor in conflict escalation and rigidifying when one side during an interaction challenges or threatens someone or a group's self-image, notably when the threat is on what Northrup (1998) calls "core constructs of identity" that are defined as non-negotiable (Cook-Huffman, 2011, 21). Likewise, Wallerstein (1979) asserts that, all identity groups are self-aware about their particularities and uniqueness. However, that self-realization emerges when groups feel threatened with a loss of previously acquired privilege, or see an opportunity to change the perceived unjust status quo (as cited in Ghais, 2018, 26). Nonetheless, it is worth to note that the perception of the unjust status quo could be shared mainly by the in-group elites. Thus, the mobilization of in-group members serves the elites interests more than the whole group (Lebanon, and Iraq as example). Kriesberg (2003) notes that in-group solidarity arises from one's self-belief that people who belong to the same identity share the same destiny and interests, and experience the same deprivation by aggregation (cited in Korostolina, 2011, 101).

Jay Rothman (1997) argues that intergroup conflicts go through four stages. First, conflict parties enter the antagonism stage where conflict counterparts antagonize one another and pursue binary thinking. Second, in the resonance stage, conflict counterparts recognize each other and shift from binary thinking to collective cooperative thinking. Third, in the "we" invention stage, conflict counterparts work together to invent acceptable solutions that are mutually agreeable and serve both parties' needs. Fourth, in the final action stage, both parties initiate the implementation of the peace agreement (Rothman and Olson, 2001, 297- 299. Also see Reimer et al., 2015, 30-31).

During conflict, protagonists exploit the in-group's collective identity such as religion, culture, ethnic identity, and history to create an in-group shared worldview and

perception about out-groups. Further, they exploit and manipulate the in-group's collective tragedies such as war losses, and the unlawful execution of the in-group's community leaders in order to motivate and mobilize other in-group members to seek revenge and change the status quo (Rothbart & Cherubin, 2011, 61). The protagonists' demonizing narratives tend to frame the intergroup differences in "axiological terms." They incorporate values of virtue, justice, and legitimacy into the in-group characteristics and their cause. In the meantime, they also attach immoral characteristics and labels such as vicious, uncivilized, wicked, and criminal to the other "perceived enemy" (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2011, 88). Therefore, the extermination of the outgroup becomes a moral necessity for the ingroup (Korostelina, 2011, 104). Therefore, the process of demonizing, dehumanizing, and discrediting the enemy escalates the conflict and diminishes the possibility of peacefully resolving the conflict (Kelman, 2011, 175).

The rise of ethnopolitical/ethnoterritorial conflicts in post-independence countries in 1960s and 1970s in numerous societies in the Global South, as well as in countries of the Global North (Britain, Canada, and Spain) reflects the failures of nation-states in managing minority groups' affairs (Byrne & Carter 2002; Byrne, Carter & Senehi, 2002; see also, Ghais, 2018, 25). Religious intolerance, systemic discrimination, and exclusion instigated and fuelled conflicts in Northern Ireland, Quebec, Bosnia, Croatia, Kosovo, Rwanda... etc., and lately Iraq, Syria, and Myanmar. Religious identity has fueled numerous protracted conflicts in the Global North and Global South alike. As such, Abu Nimer (2013, 69-80) advocates in his essay, "Religion and Peacebuilding" for the incorporation of interfaith and intra-faith dialogue and workshops into peacebuilding

approaches, and urges the academic community to endorse religious peacebuilding as a viable approach to transform relationships.

2.2.3 - Human Needs Theory

Basic human needs theory has a prominent presence in peace research. It is based on the assertion that the denial or neglect of basic human needs for a particular group creates the basis of intergroup and intercommunal conflict (Burton, 1990; Kelman, 1998). Scholars agree that the list of human needs contains both tangible and intangible needs, such as safety/security, a sense of belonging, personal fulfillment, freedom, cultural recognition, and distributive justice. However, they disagree on what to include in the categories of this list and whether the list of needs should be organized hierarchically or not (Walsh, 2016, 286). Nonetheless, peace scholars and practitioners alike agree that, “identity recognition and security [as essential needs] are critical to [solving] most, if not all, intractable conflicts” (Marker, 2003 as cited in Walsh, 2016, 286).

John Burton’s (1990) theory of intractable conflict asserts that human needs are universal and non-hierarchical (as cited in Walsh, 2016, 286). Burton sums up basic human needs in terms of personal development, security, recognition, and identity (as cited in Cook-Huffman, 2011, 22). In addition, Fisher (1997) claims that the frustration caused by the denial of basic human needs, alongside the denial of human rights leads to violent social conflicts (as cited in Korostelina, 2011, 101). The frustration that results from denial or neglect of human needs also contributes to a collective rejection of the perceived unfair/illegitimate status quo (Azar, 1986 as cited in Cook-Huffman, 2011, 23). Edward Azar’s (1986) theory of Protracted Social Conflict (PSC) claims that social

conflicts are more likely to become prolonged and violent when the denial of basic needs is fundamentally connected to issues of identity (as cited in Cook-Huffman, 2011, 22).

Kelman (2011, 171) argues that the primary cause of international conflict is collective needs and fears rather than entirely a rational calculation of objective national interests. It is thus essential to incorporate economic, psychological, cultural and social structural dimensions into peacebuilding interventions (Kelman, 2011, 172). Therefore, the ultimate goal of peacebuilding interventions should not be focused solely on how to halt violence and sign a peace deal, but also on building legal and social structures, and pursuing policies that address the socioeconomic, psychological, and cultural needs of those who were involved in and affected by the conflict (Mac Ginty, Muldoon, & Ferguson, 2007, 1-11).

Azar (1986) contends that three variables affect whether, or not a conflict resulting from the denial of basic needs becomes overt: 1) communal actions that refer to the formation and mobilization of identity groups, 2) state actions that refer to government reactions and strategies to adjust to and accommodate the demands, and 3) conflict dynamics that refer to escalatory strategies including tit-for-tat responses, attribution errors, intergroup development of enemy images, dehumanization and polarization (as cited in Cook-Huffman, 2011, 23; see also Pruitt and Kim 2004; see also, Northrup, 1998).

2.2.4 - Structural and Direct Violence

Violence can be defined as any form of verbal and/or physical action carried out by a perpetrator(s) towards another person or a group of people for the purpose of

inflicting harm and suffering upon them (see Byrne & Senehi, 2012). Johan Galtung & Tord Hoivik (1971, 73) surpassed the typical definition of violence, arguing that there are two types of violence: direct violence that kills quickly and structural violence that kills slowly. The former carries the nametag of the perpetrator; the latter remains hidden and anonymous. Galtung coined the term “structural violence” in his 1969 article, “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research” and his theoretical concept remains relevant in theory and practice, being particularly well-suited to explain current conflicts and humans’ collective past (Dilts, 2012, 191-192). He asserts that the absence of war/direct violence does not necessarily mean that society lives in peace because in each society there are the victims of the hidden forms of structural violence (Galtung, 1996 as cited in Byrne & Senehi, 2012, 12).

For Galtung (1996) direct violence takes the form of physical violence such as war, murder, assault, rape, and torture; whereas, structural violence takes the form of the unequal distribution of wealth and power. He added a third form as well which he characterized as cultural violence –that which legitimizes inflicting direct and structural violence on an outcast or minority group(s). In terms of relationality, direct violence is a manifestation/outcome of the conditions created by cultural and structural violence (Galtung, 1996 as cited in Reimer et al., 2015, 25) ultimately stressing the concept of violence visibility. Whereas direct violence is a visible action, structural violence is invisible, or perceived to be invisible. For instance, the excessive use of force by police towards protesters and the destructive actions of protesters towards private properties are considered visible. However, systemic racism towards visible minorities in the criminal justice system, and the unfair and destructive socioeconomic outcomes of neoliberal

economic measures remain invisible (Dilts, 2012, 191-193). Therefore, according to Galtung, achieving positive peace requires addressing both visible and invisible violence through the creation of structures and institutions of peace that foster justice, equity, and cooperation (Galtung, 1975, 297-304; Paffenholz, 2010, 45).

Similarly, Freire (1999) used the term “structures of oppression” referring to the socioeconomic and political structures of oppression that exist prior to conflict eruption that safeguard power imbalances and wealth disparities in favor of a particular group. Rejection of the perceived unfair status quo plays a role in generating conflict. Therefore, post-conflict peacebuilding processes must involve transforming oppressive structures into equitable and just structures (Maulden, 2013, 289).

2.3 - Peacebuilding

Peace is the ultimate goal that peace practitioners, academics, and activists strive to achieve and sustain. And yet, the concept remains elusive and ephemeral as it carries different meanings for different groups (Mendlovitz, & Walker, 1987, 3-4). Galtung (1976) is credited with inventing the concept of peacebuilding. He regarded it as a necessary component in tripartite conflict resolution strategies that included peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding (cited in Ryan, 2013, 26).

Conceptually, academic literature makes a clear distinction between peacemaking, peacebuilding, and peacekeeping. However, in practice the three processes are interconnected, and interdependent. According to Galtung (1996, 103) peacemaking refers to processes that aim to “transform attitudes and assumptions” between conflict

counterparts, peacekeeping aims to control the destructive acts of conflict parties, and peacebuilding aims to “overcome the contradictions at the root of the conflict formation.”

The meaning of peacebuilding in the academia and amongst peace practitioners has become broader. It now tends to refer to all activities and policies undertaken before, during, and/or after violent conflict to prevent, end, and transform violent conflict, and to create the necessary conditions for a long-lasting peace (Reychler, 2017). Likewise, this research uses peacebuilding in its broader sense referring to it as a longitudinal process that starts before the cessation of violence, and extends beyond cease-fires and the signing of peace accords. It has a holistic meaning/aspect that takes the form of peacemaking, and peacekeeping that are needed to build a long-lasting and just peace (peacebuilding).

According to Lederach (1997), achieving sustainable peace and transforming conflict requires an adequate understanding of cultural differences. Therefore, he uses an emic-elicitive model that empowers ordinary people and gives them a voice in the peacemaking processes (Lederach, 1997, 30-55). An important distinction to include in this model is Galtung’s (1975) model of peacebuilding, which is based on a conceptual distinction between negative peace (the end of violence) and positive peace (a just and peaceful society at all levels). Therefore, while peacekeeping strives to achieve the absence of physical/direct violence, peacebuilding and peacemaking, on the other hand, strive to achieve the absence of structural violence (Galtung, 1975 as cited in Paffenholz, 2010, 45; also see Byrne & Senehi, 2011).

2.3.1 - Peacebuilding Paradigms

Peacebuilding became part of the international agenda in early 1990s through the United Nations Secretary General Boutros-Ghali's *Agenda for Democratization* (1996) and the *Framework for Cooperation in Peacebuilding* (2001) (Paffenholz, 2010, 44-47). Boutros-Ghali (1992, parag, 21) defined peacebuilding in *An Agenda for Peace* as an, "action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict" (as cited in Ryan, 2013, 27).

Interestingly, the collapse of the Soviet Union led to the dominance of Western economic and political ideologies and systems, which led to what Mac Ginty (2006, 33-38) calls "the near hegemony" of the Western liberal peacebuilding paradigm on peacebuilding interventions (see also, Ryan, 2013, 26). Despite this dominance, the inability of the liberal peacebuilding approach to sustain peace in numerous post-conflict societies led to the emergence of a critical response that demands the localization and contextualization of peacebuilding efforts. Subsequently, the field of peacebuilding has gone through a substantial shift in theory and practice from international-oriented to local-oriented peacebuilding (Paffenholz, 2014, 11). The former approach dominated the peacebuilding framework in theory and practice. However, the re-eruption of violent conflicts in numerous post-peace accord regions in the Global South during the 1980s and 1990s raised critical voices about the efficiency, adequacy, and legitimacy of the Western-liberal "top-down" peace management approach, and led eventually to the emergence of the "bottom-up" critical emancipatory peacebuilding approach.

2.3.2 - Neoliberal Peace Approach- Top-Down Approach

For decades, Western-sponsored neoliberal peacebuilding interventions were mainly equated with achieving rapid tangible results in zones of conflict, such as ceasefires, signing peace deals, disarmament, state building, democratization, enhancement of civil society, economic liberalization, and monitoring elections (Mac Ginty, 2006, 34). However, these goals tend to more accurately reflect conflict management, as opposed to conflict resolution, and Western worldviews and solutions, rather than local ones. In other words, the Western-neoliberal approach tends to manage the manifestations of negative peace (absence of war) and fails to address the structural causes (systemic inequalities) of conflict. Proponents of this approach also underestimate the value of local knowledge and, as a result, locals lack engagement in the peacebuilding processes (Mac Ginty, Muldoon & Ferguson, 2007, 1-2; Paffenholz, 2010, 45-46; Pugh, 2011, 309-12).

Neoliberal peace theory, as it was updated after the fall of the USSR, is based on a theoretical claim that “democracies do not go to war” with each other (Mac Ginty, 2008, 142; see also, Weede, 1984; O’Neal and Russett, 1999; Doyle, 2005; Thiessen, 2013, 115-116). As such, Western democracies’ interventions in violence-torn societies are portrayed as primarily striving to implement/impose their socio-political doctrine and governmental structures in peacebuilding interventions (Mac Ginty, 2006, 40; Ryan, 2013, 27). Furthermore, the global adoption of economic neoliberalism in the 1970s and 1980s, along with the Washington Consensus model of economic development in the Western sphere transformed peacebuilding initiatives, to a large extent, into mere

mechanisms of economic neoliberalism, ultimately re-producing the very socioeconomic inequalities that created a basis for conflict eruption in the first place (Mac Ginty, 2008; Pugh, 2011; Thiessen, 2013).

Neo-liberal peacebuilding interventions also reflected the “top-down” hierarchical and bureaucratic approach that assumes the supremacy and efficiency of Western paradigms and solutions for the local problems of societies in conflict. For example, Paris (2002, 638) notes that proponents of neoliberal peace share a “belief that one model of domestic governance –liberal market democracy– is superior to all others.” Therefore, external experts in peacebuilding efforts tend to assume leadership of the peace processes, as opposed to those directly affected by the conflict. The focus on democratization and political rights, rather than socioeconomic inequalities; on economic liberalization, rather than reforming the systemic socioeconomic structures; and on conflict elites rather than ordinary people led to the eruption of public demonstrations opposing such peace practices in El-Salvador, Nicaragua, Kosovo, and East Timor. In fact, demonstrations in Kosovo and East Timor in 2004 and 2006 even turned violent (Richmond, 2014, 121; Mac Ginty, 2008, 143-145).

The implementation of neoliberal peacebuilding policies led to the standardization or benchmarking of peacebuilding interventions in all zones of conflict. This is what Mac Ginty (2008, 145) calls “peace from IKEA.” This self-interested, superficial and standardized approach contributes to the failure of peacebuilding missions to sustain peace in post-conflict areas because it fails to address the structural causes of conflict and because it dismisses the particularity of conflicts (Mac Ginty, 2006, 34).

A prime example of this was in post-conflict Kosovo where Western powers (mainly, the US, Britain, Germany, France and Italy) controlled the Kosovo Economic and Fiscal Council; the EU controlled Kosovo's economic development; the USAID controlled Kosovo's financial sector development; and an EU neoliberal appointee led the Kosovo Trust Agency in charge of privatization. Further, the IMF applauded and supported the neoliberal structural economic measures taken, further advising fiscal stringency, and the control of wages, social welfare, public sector employment, and employment compensation to workers who had lost their jobs due to privatization (Pugh, 2011, 309; for more details see also Pugh, 2006). Critical of such ventures, Pugh (2004) argues in his article, "Peacekeeping and Critical Theory," that the neoliberal peacebuilding approach was narrowly defined, and centered on the project "to doctor the dysfunction of the global political economy within a framework of liberal imperialism" (as cited in Thiessen, 2013, 125). Pugh (2013, 16) also argues that US and Western powers exert extensive power and influence over UN peacebuilding interventions through international financial institutions designed to entrench neoliberal political economics in post-conflict societies, namely, the World Bank, IMF, and donor agencies

The failure of Western-sponsored peacebuilding efforts to sustain peace in numerous post war-affected societies has put the neoliberal peacebuilding approach under scrutiny and has raised questions about its legitimacy and efficiency. For instance, the failure of post-war elections to secure peaceful political transitions in Angola (1992), Cambodia (1993), Rwanda (1994), and the destructive outcomes of liberal economic policies in El-Salvador and Nicaragua exacerbated the socioeconomic inequalities that initiated the conflicts in the first place (see Paris, 2004; Thiessen, 2013, 116; Leonardsson

& Rudd, 2015, 826; Richmond, 2014, 104-114). Awareness of this approach's deficiencies led to the emergence of a critical body of scholarship in the late 1990s calling for major revisions to the theory and practice of peacebuilding. For example, Richmond (2004) asserts in his book *A Post-Liberal Peace* that the neoliberal peacebuilding approach is seen as, "ethically bankrupt, subject to double standards, coercive and conditional, acultural, unconcerned with social welfare, and unfeeling and insensitive towards its subject" (as cited in Thiessen, 2011, 118). Therefore, a small group of theorists took critique a step beyond mere revision and called for termination of the model completely (Kriesberg, 1998, as cited in Byrne & Keashly, 2000, 115; Dominik Zaum, 2012 as cited in Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013, 768).

2.3.3 - Emancipatory Peacebuilding – A Bottom-Up Approach

By the early 2000s, a group of peace practitioners and academics called critical emancipatory theorists were breaking with the orthodox peace theories that underpinned the liberal approach. For example, Mac Ginty, and Richmond (2013) concluded that the orthodox neoliberal model of peacebuilding is "unsustainable from a normative and a strategic perspective" (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013, 764). Likewise, Paffenholz and Spurk (2006) among others also argue that this model placed increasing emphasis on quick results, leading to an insufficient "conceptual understanding of issues, [and a lack of both] sound research and critical academic reflection" (as cited in Paffenholz, 2010, 49). In contrast, Thiessen (2013, 116) argues that the rise of such criticism towards liberal peacebuilding was not only due to the approach's clear failures, but was also attributed to changes in the global economic and political climate with the rises of China, Russia, and

Iran, and regional organizations in the Global South such as the African Union that promised to “find African solutions to African problems” (Mac Ginty, 2008, 144).

The neoliberal peacebuilding approach embodied in UN peacebuilding initiatives reflected a Eurocentric approach, and represented external solutions to local problems. It reflected an implicit depreciation of local knowledge and decisionmaking processes (Richmond, 2014, 3). Thus, peace that follows peace accords may not be just or sustainable; in fact, it may reinforce division and award legitimacy to conflict protagonists, which thereby, stands as an obstacle to conflict transformation processes (Mac Ginty, 2006, 83; see also, Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013, 763; Richmond, 2014, 4-7; Paffenholz, 2010, 46-48; Mac Ginty et al., 2007, 2). Numerous Western-sponsored peace deals have led to what Mac Ginty et al. (2007) call a “fragile peace,” and a liminal peace or a “no war, no peace” (Mac Ginty et al., 2007, 2), and a “virtual peace” that has a limited impact on people, despite being recognized by internationals (Richmond and Franks, 2007 as cited in Thiessen, 2013, 117).

Mac Ginty and Richmond (2013) argue that the neoliberal peace paradigm reflects an inherent hierarchical relationship between the Global North and Global South, and international versus local, and thereby dismisses the merits of local contributors. They argue, “the local is assumed to be a near empty space, willingly subservient to Northern models and interests” (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013, 764-766; also see Richmond, 2014, 5-6; and, Pugh, 2011, 310). More specifically, Ignatieff (2005) uses the term “imperial ideology” to refer to proponents of neoliberal peace and their perceptions of the superiority of Western paradigm (as cited in Mac Ginty, 2008, 144; see also Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015, 826; Wanis-St. John, 2013, 361; and Mac Ginty, 2008, 826;

Keesing, 1992, 2; Mac Ginty, 2008, 145; Byrne, 2001, 8; Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015, 826; Thiessen, 2013, 121).

Therefore, critical emancipatory theorists have called for the decolonization of knowledge about peacebuilding and shifted their focus to developing and promoting an inclusive, sustainable, and holistic multi-track peacebuilding approach that aims towards achieving positive peace in partnership with local agencies, community leaders and ordinary individuals (Byrne & Keashly, 2000, 114-116; Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013, 764; Richmond, 2014, 12-13; Mac Ginty, 2007; Pugh, 2011, 314-315; Lederach, 1997, 20-24; Mac Ginty, 2008).

Essentially, critical emancipatory theorists advocate for the localism of peace and the empowerment of everyday peacemakers to get a seat at the table of global politics and international structures for peacebuilding. For example, Lederach (1997, 94) argues that, “the greatest resource for sustaining peace in the long term is always rooted in the local people and their culture.” Unless local community leaders, local civil society, and individuals are part of the peace process, where their voices are heard and their needs and concerns are met, mistrust, violence, and dissatisfaction will persist, which puts the peace accord in jeopardy and creates the basis for conflict re-eruption (Mac Ginty, 2007, 3-4; Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015, 826; see also Curle, 1994).

Nonetheless, the call for local agency in peacebuilding interventions faces resistance/rejection because it is perceived as “romantic, relativist or particularist, anti-democratic, anti-development [...] an affront to ‘liberal peace’, a betrayal of Marxist-derived understanding of social justice, and certainly a rejection of the ‘natural’ right of the North to intervene in the political formation of the South” (Mac Ginty & Richmond,

2013, 764). In contrast, critical emancipatory theorists are divided into two groups with regards to the neoliberal peacebuilding paradigm: a minority group that calls for its absolute abandonment, and a majority group that call instead for its reformation. Advocates of reformation have developed a “hybrid peacebuilding approach” that combines the merited strategies of the neoliberal approach with critical emancipatory approaches.

2.3.4 - Hybrid Peacebuilding Approach

Richmond (2010) notes in his book *A Genealogy of Peace and Conflict Theory* that the neoliberal peacebuilding model needs to be “localized, contextualized, and hybridized” (as cited in Thiessen, 2013, 118-119; also see Heathershaw, 2013, 277). Nonetheless, Mac Ginty (2008, 89) asserts that hybridity does not mean “the grafting together of two separate united to make a new, third entity.” Rather, he developed a bifurcated peacebuilding approach that values both the contribution of the local and Indigenous alongside the neoliberal international process (Mac Ginty, 2008 as cited in Heathershaw, 2013, 277).

Paris (2004) argues the Western-sponsored peacebuilding missions still adhere to the neoliberal peace approach, promoting democratization and human rights, and neoliberal economic policies; yet through an inclusive participatory approach (as cited in Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015, 827). The UN reacted positively to the academicians’ calls for localization and contextualization of peacebuilding efforts. Thus, in 2009, the UN Secretary General Ban-Ki Moon released a report on peacebuilding calling for the adoption of an inclusive approach that includes and, recognizes the role and voices of

locals, including local and traditional authorities, civil society, marginalized groups, youth, and women at the stage of problemsolving, policy development and implementation (Moon, 2009 as cited in Pugh, 2013, 14).

Building sustainable peace in Syria will require a hybrid-holistic peacebuilding approach that addresses the structural causes of the conflict. The adoption of liberal-democratic aspects of the neoliberal peace approach, namely democracy, human rights, equality, free-transparent election, and rule of law will create the basis of a free and just society that safeguards the rights and liberties of all Syrian citizens. However, the implementation of the neoliberal economic mechanisms such as austerity measures, fast pace privatization, and ending of subsidizations of primary basic goods will deteriorate the life standards of the majority of Syrians; which thereby will create the basis of social unrest, and lead to conflict re-eruption. Moreover, empowering locals to lead the conflict transformation processes will create the basis of peaceful co-existence and trust-building, because they will feel that they are part of the peace process, not subservient. Therefore, economic reform policies in post-conflict should not pursue necessarily the Western model of development, nor adhere strictly and entirely to the neoliberal economic institutions' directives, namely, IMF and World Bank.

2.3.5 - External Intervention and Peacebuilding

Third-party interventions in a conflict can play multiple roles. First, it plays a constructive role when a state(s) or an organization impartially facilitates direct or indirect channels of communication between the conflict counterparts (for example, Norway's role in the Oslo Accord between Palestinians and Israel), averts escalating

tensions/conflicts (for example, the High Commissioner on National Minorities of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe role in Europe), provides incentives to conflict counterparts to reach a peace agreement (for example, the US. role in the Camp David Accord between Egypt and Israel, and the US and EU roles in the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland), and intervenes militarily to protect human rights and human security (for example, NATO interventions in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Libya) (please see Donnelly, 2013, 201-204; Byrne, 2001, 3-6; Byrne, & Keashly, 2000, 98-110; Pugh, 2011, 309; Kriesberg, 2011, 161).

Second, third party interventions can also play a destructive role as in the case of sponsoring one group or movement, or meddling in the peace process (Pearson & Olsen Lounsbery, 2011, 43; Kriesberg, 2011, 161). External parties such as governments, organizations, corporations, and diaspora groups might support the group/movement, with whom they share interests, and/or identities, with weapons, financial resources, fighters, and legal and media protection. Such tendencies can intensify conflicts and transform them into protracted conflicts (Kriesberg, 2011, 161). Therefore, understanding the role of third-party intervention particularly in ethnopolitical and ethnoterritorial conflicts is crucial for ending violence, transforming conflict, and sustaining peace in the post-peace accord period. Sean Byrne's (2000, 2007) "External Ethno-Guarantors" model provides a very comprehensive analysis of the role of regional bilateral external guarantors and primary mediators in ethnoterritorial conflicts using Northern Ireland and Cyprus as comparative case studies (Byrne, 2000, 2007; see also Pearson & Olsen Lounsbery, 2011, 43-60).

The physical damage of interstate and intrastate conflicts is usually accompanied

by long-term economic stagnation, which results in high rates of unemployment and criminality, and massive migration. Such outcomes are more evident in societies that lived through protracted intrastate conflict. In fact ample research concluded that societies that have experienced a civil war never fully recover to the economic level they had before the war began (Mac Ginty, 2006, 133). Therefore, third party financial assistance in post-conflict accord can determine the success or the failure of the conflict transformation peacebuilding process. Economic assistance from the European union and US financial assistance played a pivotal role in building durable peace in Northern Ireland (Byrne et al, 2011, 490).

Nonetheless, economic redevelopment based on neoliberal economic policies is interconnected with the adopted peacebuilding approach and it has been shown that the neoliberal peacebuilding endorsement of free-market oriented, privatization and fiscal austerity measures has created the basis of conflict re-eruption in numerous post-conflict societies. For instance, eighteen months after the Dayton peace agreement, by mid-1997, unemployment in Bosnia-Herzegovina reached levels between 65-75 percent of the workforce, and eight years following the 1990 *de facto* split between Moldova and Trans-Dniester, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Moldova fell by three quarters (Mac Ginty, 2006, 132). Therefore, halting violence, and ending the mortality and morbidity associated with war may be the only significant benefit of peace for large numbers of people in zones of conflict, and post-conflict periods, unless peacebuilding efforts were associated with effective economic aid and policies to help ordinary people to recover their livelihoods and build their human capital (Mac Ginty, 2006, 132). Ultimately, until now, economic development based on neoliberalism that does not meet the needs of

ordinary people in the post peace accord phase, and/or the practice of uneven distribution of economic aid may lead to conflict re-eruption.

The linkage between economic development styles and building a durable peace is cordial. Paul Collier (2002, 110-111) asserts that three economic indications are sufficient in predicting civil war eruption; 1) low per capita income, 2) low economic growth, and 3) dependence on primary product exports concluding that doubling per capita income can reduce the risk of civil war by half. Further, he argues that doubling income per capita reduces the risk of civil war eruption by half (Mac Ginty, 2006, 135).

2.3.6 - The Role of Diaspora in Peacebuilding

Historically, the term “Diaspora” has been used to describe the dispersal of Jews, Greeks, Irish, Kurds, and Armenians from their original homelands. However, now it is widely used to refer to immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile community, and ethnic community (Totolian, 1991, 4-5 as cited in Demmers, 2002, 88). In contrast, Brubaker (2005) narrowly defines the term to refer specifically to ingroup members who are proactively engaged in serving claims and taking political stances that relate to their ancestral land. Anderson (1998) calls that segment of Diaspora “long-distance nationalists” (as cited in Koinova, 2011, 336).

However, Werbner (1999, 24) asserts that diaspora groups are not homogenous on all levels; conversely, they are as diverse as the rest of society. They are, “stratified by class, caste, education, occupation, religious affiliation, cultural interests, urban or rural background” (as cited in Snyder, 2013, 177). Therefore, not all diaspora members involve themselves in the conflict in the homeland. In fact, diasporas may acquire new identities

in host countries, changing mono-dimensional identities (Snyder, 2011, 187). While this might be true, Koinova (2011, 334) notes that diasporas exert a great influence on their respective homeland politics at two particular junctures: when grave human right atrocities occur in the homeland, and when local moderate elites lose credibility to the point that they can achieve the secessionist goal.

Diaspora activism increasingly represents a crucial unit of analysis in recent PACS research due to its vital impact on conflict trajectories in their respective countries of origin. Collier and Hoeffler (2000), for example, assert that violent conflict continuation is linked to large diasporas. Further, Collier, et al.'s (2003, 85) statistical study for the World Bank concluded that diasporas “increase the risk of a return to violence” (as cited in Kent, 2006, 451). Similarly, Scheffer (2003) and Lyons (2006) argue that diasporas generated by conflicts rather than by voluntary migration are more likely to maintain a trauma of displacement, closely follow homeland politics, and continuously carry a myth of return to a homeland territory. Further, (Sheffer 2003) claims that stateless diasporas are more likely to remain involved with homeland politics as long as the nationalist struggle continues (Koinova, 2011, 335, 341). Hence, understanding the “diaspora ethos” is an instrumental step in the process of understanding diaspora’s commitment and engagement in homeland politics/conflict (Kent, 2006, 451).

Smith and Stares (2007) emphasize in their book, *Diasporas in Conflict: Peacemakers or Peace-Wreckers*, that diasporas can be both peacemakers, and/or peace wreckers or spoilers, and even sometimes both “at one and same time” (as cited in Snyder, 2013, 177). Historically, diaspora groups in the West such as American Jews, Croats, Tamils, Kurds, Khmer, American Irish, Kosovar Albanians, Ukrainians,

Armenians, Palestinians, Ethiopians, and Chechens have played both constructive and destructive roles in conflict and resolution dynamics in their respective homeland countries. Diasporas' activities have contributed to the intensification and prolongation of violence by funneling arms, financial assets, and fighters into the country, by lobbying hosting countries governments and organizations, by disseminating propaganda, and by organizing protests to support the conflict counterpart with whom they share interests, and/or identity (Koinova, 2011, 335; see also Byman et al., 2001; Hockenos 2003). In other cases, diasporas' initiatives have mobilized international pressure to cease violence, initiated humanitarian interventions, reconciliation, and peacebuilding processes, and organized demonstrations and media campaigns to mobilize the public and raise awareness about the conflict (Demmers, 2002, 86-89; Paul, 2000, 24-26; Koinova, 2011, 348-351; Cochrane, Baser & Swain, 2009, 684-700).

Diaspora's involvement in conflict trajectories in their respective homelands is not static. As conflicts change throughout time, diaspora's role and responses change. For instance, during the Northern Ireland conflict, at a certain time, a segment of Irish diaspora in the US supported the armed struggle of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA). However, as the conflict escalated, the American Irish perception of it also changed, especially high profile figures in the Irish diaspora who distanced themselves from the PIRA, and even condemned its violent tactics. Essentially, high profile members of the Irish diaspora, politicians, and senators, convinced the PIRA to halt its violence and adopt peaceful measures, lobbying the Clinton administration to engage in a conflict resolution process, which led successfully to the signing of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement (Byrne, et. al., 2007).

Understanding the impact of diasporas on the dynamics and outcomes of any given conflict requires studying its organizational capacity, the economic and political capacity/power of its members, and the length of their settlement in the host country. The Syrian Diaspora in the West might not have the political influence, economic power or organizational capacity that Irish-Americans, American-Armenians, and Canadian-Tamils have had (Cochrane et al., 2009, 691-699; Koinova, 2011, 338-339). However, they still have some capabilities to influence the trajectories of the Syrian conflict. Accessibility to social media and the Internet may enable them to construct an alternative discourse in mobilizing international pressure to end the conflict. Koinova (2011, 347) argues that the global media's extensive coverage of conflict; especially gruesome human rights atrocities have had a "magnifying effect on diaspora populations." Accordingly, the alleged multiple use of chemical weapons by pro-Assad forces triggered international outrage. Syrian activists shared with the international media the images of civilian victims of the chemical attacks in order to mobilize political pressure on Assad regime leading to wide international condemnation and military air strikes against the pro-Assad forces (Globe and Mail, 2018; United Nations, 2018).

Furthermore, diaspora's role in their homeland politics/conflicts is instrumental during and in post-conflict periods as well. Mohan and Zack-Williams (2002, 211) argue that diasporas plays pivotal roles in their homelands both politically and economically (Kent, 2006, 452; see also Snyder, 2013, 177-198). For instance, in post-conflict Afghanistan and Iraq, leaders of Afghan and Iraqi diasporas occupied high profile positions in government. In fact, three-quarters of Hamid Karzai's 30 cabinet ministers, including the president, were members of the Afghan diaspora (Kent, 2006, 452).

Moreover, financial remittances of diasporas to their homeland countries can play a vital role in reconstruction and economic development post-conflict. Capital flow in the form of donations, and investment from diaspora to home countries amounted to \$500 billion per year globally (Kent, 2006, 453). However, in 2017, that amount reached \$596 billion, with \$450 billion going to developing countries (Global Impact for Migration, 2017).

2.4 - Conflict Transformation Theory

Conflict transformation theories focus on transforming violence into peaceful behaviour (Paffenholz, 2014, 13). Numerous PACS theorists have developed strategies for waging conflicts peacefully by promoting the means and processes of conflict management and resolution (Kriesberg, 2011, 157-169).

The conceptual development of conflict transformation theory is traced back to Galtung's theory on violence and peacebuilding in his 1969 article "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," as well as Curle's (1990) work on transforming relationships, Edward Azar's theory of protracted conflict in his 1990 book *The Management of Protracted Social Conflict*, Paulo Freire's work, especially his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and Kelman and Fisher's work on relationship-building. Nonetheless, the theory emerged as a prominent peacebuilding approach through John Paul Lederach's 1997 ground-breaking book, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (all cited in Paffenholz, 2014, 12-15).

Lederach's (1997) conflict transformation theory defines peacebuilding as an inclusive long-term and multi-track process that aims to transform violence-torn societies from a state of war/violence to one of peace. During such a process, it is crucial to focus on the personal, structural, relational and cultural aspects of conflict in order to build a

long-term peace. This process is best encapsulated in Lederach's "Peacebuilding Pyramid," which stresses the importance of cooperation between three levels of leadership to build peace. First, "Top Leadership" includes high profile military, religious and political leaders. Second, "Middle-Range Leadership" includes individuals with expertise in peacebuilding and development; namely, leaders in certain sectors, such as religious/ethnic leaders, academics/intellectuals, and humanitarian leaders. Third, "Grassroots Leadership" includes local leaders, Indigenous leaders, community developers, local health officials, refugee camp leaders and similar people. Each level of leadership develops initiatives that contribute to the peacebuilding process. While the top leadership engages in peace negotiations to reach a ceasefire and a peace accord, middle-range leadership engages in problemsolving, training in conflict resolution, and assistance in building the structures of peace commissions. The grassroots leadership acts locally in practical terms, establishing local peace commissions, providing grassroots training, engaging in prejudice reduction, and providing psychosocial assistance for victims of trauma.

Essentially, Lederach (1997) has constructed a theory of "multi-level" action that is much more reliant on grassroots forces for change than (neo)liberal peacebuilding theories. Central to his theory is the elite-grassroots nexus—strategies at the upper national level must feed on the energy of processes at the grassroots level and, concurrently, national level policies can ameliorate tensions at the community level. In negative terms, transformative progress at the grassroots level will be significantly impeded with insecurity at the national elite level, while a failure to address basic needs at the grassroots level will create societal instability and threats of violence which

handicap macro-level transformative activities (Lederach, 1997 as cited in Thiessen, 2013, 130).

The transformative peacebuilding approach aims at building sustainable peace by repairing and restoring relationships, and providing closure, healing, and justice to victims of the conflict and their families. It works at establishing the political and socioeconomic mechanisms that address structural and systemic inequalities and strives to involve all parties affected by the conflict in the process, particularly youth. Finally, it establishes the legal frameworks and structures that guarantee avoidance of the recurrence of gruesome human rights atrocities. Byrne (2001) outlined ten propositions of a transformational peacebuilding approach and examined their application in Northern Ireland post-peace accord (1998 Good Friday Agreement). The ten propositions highlight the vital role of civil society, local agency, Indigenous knowledge, respect, external guarantors, and economic development in promoting relationship rebuilding, intergroup mutual understanding, trust-building, prejudice reduction, and inclusion promotion through the reintegration of conflict protagonists, human rights and social justice (Byrne 2001, 4-18).

Relationship transformation is a central objective in conflict transformational theory. In fact, Lederach (1997) places relationships “at the heart of conflict transformation” (as cited in Reimer, et. al state, 2015, 25). Human relationships transform social conflict; meanwhile, they are also transformed by the conflict. In other words, relationships, to some extent, can determine the trajectories of social conflicts. Thus, understanding the hidden, old, and new relationships between and within communities empowers scholars and practitioners to develop effective strategies to deescalate social

conflicts through relationship transformation. PACS researchers recognize that relationship building/repair is an essential step in the process of peacebuilding and conflict transformation. Such a claim is well presented and advocated for by proponents of community-engaged research (Reimer et al., 2015, 54) (see also Kelman, 1998, 9)

Transformative change as a PACS core concept is well served through Indigenous restorative justice approaches. Reimer et al (2015, 160) state that, “the restorative processes movement addresses the heart and soul of peacebuilding, seeking to provide compassionate principles for the transformation of conflict.” Restorative justice approaches offer a dramatically different response to harm/conflict occurrence and its underlying causes than the attributive justice system. While the former focus on healing, repairing relationships, community engagement in the conflict transformation process, and addressing the causes of harm, in contrast, the latter focuses on retribution, punishment, and individual accountability (Stuart et al., 2003, p. 10-13, 29; Elliot, 2011, p. 67).

2.4.1 - Indigenous and Local Communal Peacemaking Approaches

The military and economic ascendancy of Western Europe over the rest of the world since the 17th century, and later the US since the late 19th century, resulted in Western cultural dominance over other cultures. Antonio Gramsci’s concept of “cultural hegemony,” Frantz Fanon’s (1967) “internalization of oppression,” Paulo Freire’s (1997) concept of “Pedagogy of the Oppressed,” and Edward Said’s (1978) concept of “Orientalism” accurately depict the dialectical relationship between the West with its ontological and epistemological realities versus the rest, the “non-European others.”

Since Syria is a Middle Eastern Arab-Muslim society, it is important to address

the Eurocentric perceptions about the Arab world. Edward Said's (1978) groundbreaking book, *Orientalism* discusses as well the Occident's (West) distorted and imaginary perceptions about the Orient; namely, the Arab world societies in the Middle East and North Africa. Said argues that the Western discourse about the Arab world depicted in novels, poetry, and paintings since the European Renaissance (until now in the media) is distorted and closer to mythology than reality (Said, 1978, 11). That discourse inaccurately made (and still makes) a clear distinction between the West as developed, and civilized, and the Orient as backward, and uncivilized, and today since 9/11 attacks as a dangerous security threat (Said, 1978, 10,13).

The emergence and development of PACS as a field in the Western cultural context reflected, in its early stages of development, the Eurocentric approach (Tuso, 2013, 261; Sandole, 2011, 420-421; Regan, 2013, 183-193; Freire 1997; Reimer, et al., 2015, 48, Smith, 1999). For example, Mac Ginty (2011) asserts in his book, *International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance* that, "the liberal peace has been unable to transcend its top-down bias [towards Indigenous peacemaking processes]" (as cited in Thiessen, 2011, 120). Likewise, Tuso (2013, 250) argues that Indigenous knowledge was perceived as less valuable in academia compared to Western knowledge (see also Mac Ginty, 2008; Richmond 2014; Pugh, 2011; Byrne, 2001; Lederach, 1997). Nonetheless, Tuso (2013, 250-253) argues in his essay, "Indigenous Processes of Conflict Resolution," that Indigenous peacemaking processes have remained in the periphery even in the Global South because the urban elites that inherited the colonial powers deliberately neglected Indigenous knowledge, and chose to embrace Western educational and cultural values (also see Pugh, 2011, 310; Mac Ginty, 2008, 147; Sponsel and Gregor, 1994; Ferguson,

1988). However, as the PACS field developed and ascribed to itself the label of being “interdisciplinary,” conflict resolution scholarship gradually welcomed and recognized the merits of other forms of peacemaking processes (Abu Nimer, 1996a, 35-37; Abu Nimer, 1996b, 23-37). Therefore, Indigenous scholars have demanded the decolonization of research methodologies and have engaged in a continuous struggle seeking reciprocal recognition of the validity and legitimacy of Indigenous cultural norms and worldviews. For instance, New Zealand Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) initiated the discourse of Indigenous research through her book, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, promoting the particularity and legitimacy of indigenous research methods (as cited in Reimer *et al.*, 2015, 48; see also Wilson, 2008).

In short, critical and emancipatory scholars assert that local Indigenous, and communal peacemaking processes present the ultimate solutions to deep-rooted issues in zones of conflict where the neoliberal peace approach has failed. For example, Zartman (2000) asserts that traditional peacemaking processes are more effective in managing today’s societies’ conflict (as cited in Wanis-St. John, 2013, 360; see also, Cockell, 2000; Thiessen, 2013, 120-121). Indigenous/communal peacemaking processes can be characterized as victim-centered, participatory, dignified, egalitarian, consensual, collective, and restorative of relationships and communal harmony. They are recognized as spiritual, authentic, time-honored and acceptable venues in which to address conflicts (Mac Ginty, 2008, 142; Tuso, 2013, 254-267; Wanis-St. John, 2013, 365; Stuart *et al.*, 2003, 10-13, 29; Elliot, 2011, 67). Mac Ginty (2008, 142) argues, for example, that the popularity of Indigenous peacemaking processes stems from the emphasis it places on “dialogue, social justice, and conflict transformation (rather than conflict resolution).” As

such, the last decade has been marked by a remarkable interest in restorative justice worldwide, and it has been used in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, US., and the UK to deal with youth crime as well as youth care and protection issues (Johnstone, 2012, 3-4). Moreover, it has gained international recognition by the United Nations. In 2002, the United Nations Economic and Social Council enacted a resolution containing guidance for member states for the use of restorative justice practice and policy (Tompsonski, et al., 2011).

2.4.2 - The Path to Reconciliation – Judicial and non-Judicial Transitional Justice

Societies that have experienced protracted periods of political violence and civil war have faced the necessity of addressing the physical and psychological consequences of violence during conflict in order to secure a peaceful political transition towards a democratic and just society (Wanis-St. John, 2013, 362; Klinkner & Smith, 2015, 18). Hence, governments in post-violence societies have faced the challenge to strike a balance between serving justice, the ambition to achieve reconciliation and healing, and determination to consolidate the fragile social harmony that ensues (Wanis-St. John, 2013, 367).

Reconciliation as a central objective of transitional justice and transformational peacebuilding deals “with residues of conflict and trauma [...because] conflicts often defy our capacity to reason” (Hutchison & Bleiker, 2013, 82; see also Caruth 1996; Edkins, 2003; Humphrey, 2002: 11–25; Scarry, 1985: 4–11). Hamber and Kelly (2009, 290) note that reconciliation “implies a muddying of the waters and a fundamental change in perceptions of the other” (as cited in Wanis-St. John, 2013, 364). For Lederach

(1997, 28-29) reconciliation needs to be based on truth, justice, mercy and peace. The four concepts must be regarded as the guiding goals of the reconciliation process. In other words, the process must unveil the forms and magnitudes of past human rights abuses, and serve the victims' need for justice. Yet, take in consideration the repercussions of retribution on the peacebuilding efforts.

The 2004 Report of the Secretary General on the Rule of Law and Transitional Justice in Conflict and Post-Conflict Societies defined transitional justice as “the full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society’s attempts to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation. These may include either judicial or non-judicial mechanisms, with differing levels of international involvement (or none at all) and individual prosecutions, reparations, truth-seeking, institutional reform, vetting and dismissals, or a combination thereof” (Report of the Secretary General, 2004).

Peacebuilding and transitional justice are intrinsically interconnected. While the former focuses on processes that end conflict and sustain peace, the latter addresses the society’s aggregate pain and trauma, provides reparations to victims and their families, and establishes legal and organizational structures to avoid the recurrence of past human rights atrocities. In fact, transitional justice is an essential element in the peacebuilding process because the success or failure of either of its mechanisms in the implementation stage correlates with the viability of peacebuilding (Wanis-St. John, 2013, 362).

Capacity building in post-peace settlements, through state building, as well as providing security and safeguarding the rule of law, and democratization, is an important step in the peacebuilding process (Cousens & Kumar, 2001; Mac Ginty & Richmond,

2009; Pugh 2000; Richmond 2008; Richmond 2011; Richmond & Franks, 2009). Nevertheless, building a durable peace requires addressing the human rights atrocities that were committed during conflict and responding positively to the psychological trauma and needs of victims and their families. Otherwise, antagonism, emotional grievances, and the perception of injustice prevail to create the basis of conflict re-eruption. Hutchison and Bleiker (2013, 85) assert that, “no matter how secure and democratically ordered a post-conflict society is, it is unlikely to achieve lasting stability if the underlying emotional sources of conflict remain unaddressed.”

Transitional justice with its both mechanisms, judiciary and non-judiciary, has been the subject of extensive debates amongst peacebuilding theorists and practitioners. Nonetheless, each mechanism has its merits, and shortcomings. Neoliberal peace theorists emphasize the merits of individual accountability in providing deterrence against future transgression. In contrast, emancipatory theorists argue that the Western retributive system is foreign and reflects the justice of the victorious; hence, they highlight the merits of non-judiciary and local (Indigenous) reconciliation processes. Diane Orentlicher (2007, 21) argues, for example, that local cultural preferences for reconciliation through non-judiciary local processes might be more meaningful to communities of victims and violence, but that preference to local/Indigenous processes of reconciliation, “should not be used to justify and extend a ‘culture of impunity conducive to violence’” (as cited in Wanis-St. John, 2013, 371). Therefore, there is a call to combine both mechanisms creating a hybrid system for justice and reconciliation that meets the needs for justice, alongside the restoration of relationships and social harmony (Mac Ginty, 2008; Tuso, 2013, Wanis-St. John, 2013; Heathershaw, 2013, 277).

2.4.3 - *Individual Accountability: Retribution as a Prerequisite for Reconciliation*

The Western retributive accountability for war crimes is traced back to the Nuremberg and Tokyo tribunals that were established post-WWII to prosecute the perpetrators of gruesome crimes committed by Nazi Germany and Japan during the war. Individual accountability for war crimes has expanded with the widespread of intrastate conflicts since the 1990s onwards. The UN Security Council established numerous *ad hoc* tribunals under chapter VII of the UN Charter with specific mandates to investigate and prosecute war crimes in relation to particular countries, such as the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia in 1993, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in 1994, Sierra Leone, East Timor, Lebanon, Kosovo, Cambodia, and elsewhere (Wanis-St. John, 2013, 364-366).

However, the adoption of the Rome Statute on July 17, 1998, created the International Criminal Court (ICC) as a permanent court with a global jurisdiction and specific mandate under Article 5 (1) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court which states that, “the jurisdiction of the Court shall be limited to the most serious crimes of concern to the international community as a whole. The Court has jurisdiction in accordance with this Statute with respect to the following crimes: (a) genocide; (b) crimes against humanity; (c) war crimes; [and] (d) aggression” (Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, 1998).

However, the Western powers’ endorsement of individual accountability is not a fit-for-all policy. For example, societies that have faced a large scale of violence such as Rwanda could not pursue individual accountability due to the vast number of Hutu

perpetrators (Tuso, 2013, 258; see also, Pesonen, 2002, 16; Bretherton, et al, 2003, 223). Also, sometimes, providing amnesty becomes the prerequisite to halt violence and initiate the peace process (Sadat, 2007, 225). Further, the role of victims as witnesses in the retributive justice system puts them in a vulnerable position; particularly, when their testimonies are cross-examined, and they are required to respond to questions and recount horrific memories, and oftentimes the perpetrator is in a position to kill the witness. Such a process can be re-traumatizing, puts limits on the victim's responses, and sometimes becomes dismissive. Therefore, Eric Stover (2005, 129) argues that the court system might be "ill-suited for the sort of expansive and nuanced storytelling so many witnesses yearn to engage in" (as cited in Klinkner & Smith, 2015, 10). As such, alternative avenues have opened up.

Syria's ongoing civil war has passed the seventh year (2011-2018), as conflict expands overtime, the number of conflicting parties increases; therefore, the prosecution of all militants who committed human rights violations in Syria might be less feasible from a practical standpoint. Nonetheless, the prosecution of protagonists (conflicting parties leaders) might provide closure to victims and their families and create the basis of a successful transition towards peace. However, the critical questions here are, will external (regional and international) guarantors accept the prosecution of their sponsored protagonists; particularly, President Assad and inner circle leadership of his regime? Do Syrians endorse reconciliation, or retribution? The latter question was asked during interviews. The participants' responses are further discussed in chapter, five, and six.

2.4.4 - Non-Judicial Route Towards Reconciliation and Healing

Truth-telling commission is a non-judiciary mechanism of transitional justice. It has been created widely in global North and global South societies that experienced periods of political violence, and injustice towards a particular group(s) such as South Africa, Morocco, Balkans, and Canada. The ultimate objectives of truth-telling commissions is to investigate the period of violence, create a platform to listen to victims and perpetrators, address the victims' needs, and propose venues/policies for reparation, the reintegration/rehabilitation of perpetrators, and institutional/legal reforms in post-conflict. However, the downfall of its processes lays in the lack of legal force of the commissions' final reports, which mainly takes the form of recommendations that require political will for implementation (Klinkner & Smith, 2015, 18-19).

The main objective of most truth commissions is to create a historical narrative of shared traumatic history by creating a space of interaction between victims and perpetrators to prompt sentiments of sympathy and empathy, and collective catharsis— a step in social and psychological healing for those who have experienced war, violence, depredations and victimization. However, this is not straightforward. Not every individual or culture places a value on the open, transparent exploration or ventilation of traumatic events, experiences and memories. Some feel that they are re-traumatized and re-victimized by the process (Wanis-St. John, 2013, 365).

The right to truth is a fundamental goal of truth-telling commissions. It compasses the right to seek and obtain detailed information about the causes and circumstances of detention, and conditions and reasons that lead to the victimization of the concerned individual(s) (Klinkner & Smith, 2015, 6). The right to truth developed in the 1970s in the context of missing and disappeared individuals under notorious military dictatorships

in South America. The rights of victims and their families to know the fate or whereabouts of their relatives were recognized internationally by regional and international human rights organizations. For instance, Article 24 (2) of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CED), which was promulgated in December 2010, affirms the right to truth in the specific context of forced disappearance (Klinkner & Smith, 2015, 5).

Survivors of traumatic experiences in post-conflict societies share and transmit their sentiments of anger, resentment, fear, and perception of injustice through storytelling to their immediate and larger social circle (Senehi, 2009). Thus, unless, they are satisfied about the reconciliation process, and/or its outcomes, their shared emotional grievances create the basis of conflict re-eruption. This has been the case in numerous societies from Sudan, Northern Ireland, and Palestine (Hutchison & Bleiker, 2013, 84; Byrne & Nadan, 2013, 64).

Reconciliation processes creates space for direct contact/interaction between victims and perpetrators in order to heal and forgive together. Truth and reconciliation commissions provide the opportunity for victims to disclose to their perpetrators, as well as to the public, their experiences and needs, sentiments of fear, anger, and insecurity that resulted from their traumatic experiences. Also, it enables perpetrators to express remorse, sympathy, compassion, and seek redemption and forgiveness. Hutchison and Bleiker (2013, 86) assert that, “if divided societies are to come together and start a process of healing, then there need to be strategies in place that allow individuals and groups to negotiate past grievances, and to reflect upon how their memories and emotions force the past into the politics of the present.” Truth and reconciliation commissions

represent one example of such a strategy. The merit of truth commissions rests in creating a process of “re-humanization” between victims and perpetrators, and amongst the general public. Thus, Gobodo-Madikizela (2002, 22) asserts that the testimonies of victims elicit sentiments that resonate with perpetrators and the public creating an atmosphere of empathy and sympathy that prompts determination to take responsibility for the past crimes and build the necessary mechanisms for durable peace (as cited in Hutchison & Bleiker, 2013, 86; see also Whitebrook, 2002). Muldoon (2008) and Govier (2002) argue that displaying emotions of fear and anger during testimonies are essential for the success of the reconciliation process “to placate feelings of revenge and create a culture of healing and collaboration” (as cited in Hutchison & Bleiker, 2013, 85). The narrative that emerges of public testimonies in truth-telling commission creates the basis of inclusive history and transformation process in society. For example, Senehi (2009, 203-204) asserts, “when only those in power have access to producing knowledge, authoritative-discourses may serve the interests of power rather than truth.”

Reconciliation in the Western paradigm has primarily been equated with retributive justice and principles such as rule of law and human rights. Perpetrators who committed gruesome human rights atrocities during conflict must face trials in courts and/or condemnation of their actions in the truth and reconciliation commissions. In contrast, in the critical emancipatory approach, reconciliation is an inclusive and locally oriented process (Simić, & Volčič, 2013; Thiessen, 2013, 128). Besides the legal aspect of retribution, reconciliation in an emancipatory approach takes the form of workshops and activities at the local levels and led by local civil society, community leaders, and individuals in order to provide communal healing from trauma, define new norms of

social conduct, and rebuild communal mutual trust, and respect (Thiessen, 2013, 128; Wanis-St. John, 2013, 361; see also, Kelman, 2006; Fisher, 2009).

2.4.5 - Peace Education's Contributions to Transformative Change in Post-Conflict Societies

Peace education can be broadly defined as education that promotes peace, mutual understanding, and reduces tension and violence (Kyuchukov & New, 2016, 335). It is both a philosophy and a process. The former refers to education underpinned by social justice, human rights, nonviolence, and mutual understanding. However, the latter refers to education that seeks to empower students with the required technical skills, and social and humane values to build a society wherein such values are standard to be upheld (Lauritzen, 2016, 78). The content of peace education programs, both formal and informal focus on various issues such as human rights, conflict resolution strategies, conflict trauma, religious tolerance, mutual understanding, and respect through inclusive curriculum (Bretherton, et al., 2003, 223).

Education systems play a crucial role in either fueling conflict or building peace. For example, unequal access to quality education, especially, when it is linked to identity-based categories such as race, culture, and religion (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000; Davies, 2011; Smith, 2005), using the mother tongue of one ethnic group as official learning language (UNESCO, 2011; Pherali & Gerratt, 2013), and the teaching of one-sided narratives about history, culture, and religion (UNESCO, 2011) correlate with conflict eruption (Lauritzen, 2016, 77). Often, prior to outbreak of ethnopolitical conflicts, the formal education mirrors the socioeconomic and ethnic inequalities that exist in society

(Maulden, 2013, 289; see also Ferire, 1999, 55-5).

Education is an essential component in the process of reconciliation and conflict transformation. Knutzen and Smith (2012, 64) identify three ways education plays into peacebuilding: first, education can operate as a ‘peace dividend’. That is, the end of a conflict can provide a valuable opportunity for governments to show greater commitment to improving social services and quality of education. Second, education can potentially contribute to stability if it is ‘conflict sensitive’. Finally, education can be ‘transformative’ in terms of, transforming values, attitudes and behaviours (as cited in Lauritzen, 2016, 78).

Prior to conflict reescalation, and during conflict, warring parties construct perceptions about each other that demonize and delegitimize the opponent’s cause, and thus, normalize and justify aspects of violence in everyday and community life. Therefore, peacemaking and peacebuilding entails stipulating measures that not only ensure the cessation of violence and hostilities, but also dismantle intergroup biases, prejudice, and stereotypes, and construct shared values and concepts that promote peaceful co-existence, mutual understanding and respect, human rights, and equity (Bretherton, et al, 2003, 220-222; Lauritzen, 2016, 77). Hence, Maulden (2013, 287) asserts that the transitional period that follows reaching conflict resolution represents a “window opportunity” to initiate educational reform.

Peace education takes the form of formal education to young pupils and youth, as well as informal education in local communities through workshops, seminars, skills training, and apprenticeships that teach conflict resolution skills (Maulden, 2013, 287). For example, Lauritzen (2016, 77) concludes that UNICEF’s peace education program in

Kenya after the 2008 election conflict focused on three levels of peacebuilding: individual, interpersonal, and community.

Although peace education has been found to have a positive transformative effect (for e.g., Arnon & Galily, 2014; Levy, 2014), research has also shown that education reform in post-conflict societies is not an easy task. For instance, Salomon (2004, 257–61) notes that peace education in regions of intractable conflict confronts serious obstacles such as intergroup conflicting collective narratives about history, and religion, grave inequalities, excessive emotionality, and unsupportive social climates (as cited in Maulden, 2013, 289). Education systems mimic the sociocultural beliefs and cleavages of society prior to the outbreak of civil war; thus, changing and introducing new concepts and values sometimes means facing strong resistance at the grassroots level. For instance, in numerous post-conflict societies, NGO campaigns that focused on the education of girls and young women faced resistance at the local level due to the sociocultural and patriarchal worldviews of those communities (Maulden, 2013, 289). Furthermore, parents and teachers can influence the students' "internalization of peace values" (Yahya et al., 2012; Zembylas et al., 2011, 2012). For example, in the context of Cyprus, Zembylas et al., (2012) found that teachers were resistant to peace education initiatives initiated by the government (as cited in Lauritzen, 2016, 78).

The international law of human rights stresses the universalism of human rights. Article five of the 1993 Vienna Declaration states that "all human rights are universal, indivisible, and interdependent and interrelated" (Donnelly, 2013, 31). Thus, Western-sponsored peacebuilding interventions in post-conflict societies have striven to promote liberal human rights, such as egalitarianism, gender equity, girls' accessibility to

education, and nonviolence against women, using different means, including educational reform. For example, Merry (2006, 25) states that, “diminishing violence against women requires cultural transformation.” At the same time, in practice, some countries invoke arguments about cultural relativism to reject Western human rights norms altogether. Ideally, introducing and implementing human rights principles needs to pursue “culturally-sensitive” approaches that reflect respect, dignity, and appreciation to local knowledge. Further, it should be noted that change imposed by outside forces is less feasible compared to “change from within” that is led by local individuals, community leaders, and civil society at the grassroots.

Overall, parents across cultures tend to believe that a better future for their children is best facilitated by better educational opportunities (Snyder, 2013, 187). Formal education can provide students with both knowledge and skills, as well as social and humane values such as empathy, sympathy, compassion, and tolerance (Maulden, 2013, 287-288). Thus, the merits of peace education lay in the future more than the present. The ability of teaching and planting values of peace, tolerance, mutual respect and understanding has the potential to create a future reconciled generation of adults (Mac Ginty, 2013, 1).

2.5 - Conclusion

As illustrated in this chapter, PACS scholarship provides multiple theoretical frameworks that explain the eruption of intrastate conflicts (ethnopolitical conflicts), and de-escalation strategies that end conflicts and transform them. Interstate and intrastate violent conflicts continue to disrupt the lives of millions of civilians in zones of conflict

in different parts of the world. Yet, the role of these civilians in the processes of conflict analysis and resolution, and the implementation of peacebuilding initiatives is mostly limited. Despite this poor practice, theorists such as Lederach (1997, 24) note that “peacebuilding initiatives must be rooted in and be responsive to people’s subjective realities, grievances, and needs in order to sustain holistic reconciliation and peace.” Thus, the key question here is how do Syrian refugees understand the conflict, peacebuilding, and reconciliation, and what role they intend to play in those processes now and in post-conflict.

The following chapter presents the adopted research methodology in this study to inquire about the study participants’ perceptions and approaches to end Syria’s civil war, and build a long-lasting peace in post peace accord.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 - Introduction

This exploratory case study utilized a qualitative interview methodology with semi-structured open-ended questions to explore how do 12 Syrian refugees perceive peace? What do they think would constitute sustainable peace in Syria? And how do they intend to contribute to peacebuilding and reconciliation? The study used convenience, purposive and snowball methods of recruitment in order to have a diverse sample that represents a subset of the Syrian diaspora population living on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada. Grounded theory is used for data analysis in order to synthesize the major themes that emerged inductively from the interviews. Those major themes that emerged from the qualitative data were conflict, peacebuilding, and reconciliation.

3.2 - Recruitment Strategy

Prior to advertising the study in local community centers, approaching gatekeepers, and recruiting potential study participants, I applied and received human ethics approval from the University of Manitoba. This study adhered to all of the commitments enlisted in the approved REB application. Since the initial REB approval expired on August 31, 2018, before the closure of the study, I applied and received a renewal approval to August 31, 2019.

After receiving ethics approval, I emailed and phoned various local non-profit organizations that assist Syrian refugees in their resettlement journey, as well as the management of local mosques throughout Vancouver Island. Ultimately, all of my emails and phone calls recipients reacted positively towards the research project and expressed

their enthusiasm and encouragement. Some were reluctant to engage directly in the research driven by the desire to protect the safety and welfare of their Syrian refugee clients. Eventually, after multiple exchanges of emails, phone calls, and face-to-face meetings, I received the approval of some gatekeepers to post the “Recruitment letter”(Appendix 2 and 3) in the announcement board in various community-based organizations. Furthermore, some gatekeepers who endorsed the study invited me to their community gatherings to provide a succinct overview of the research, and later on, they provided me with the assistance of one member of the community who engages closely with the Syrian refugee community and that person had gained their trust. Ultimately, my “quasi-outsider” positionality as a Canadian-Moroccan, and the support and endorsement of gatekeepers granted me the privilege to gain the preliminary trust of potential participants to move forward with the research.

This study used three non-probability sample strategies combined to recruit participants: namely, a convenience sample, a purposive sample, and a snowball sample in order to offset the limitations of each strategy, increase the probability of recruiting participants that represent some sub-categories of Syrian society, and generate a more complex sample (Berg, 2007, 41-45-46; Teddlie & Fen, 2007, 80-85).

A convenience sample refers to recruiting prospective participants that are available and easily accessible (Babbie, 1998; Mutchnick & Berg, 1996, as cited in Berg, 2007, 43). A snowball sample, on the other hand, is known as a chain referral (Biernack & Waldrof, 1981; Owens, 2005; Penord, Preston, Cain, & Stark, 2003, as cited in Berg, 2007, 44) or as respondent-driven because researchers rely on participants and gatekeepers’ referrals to recruit other participants (Heckathorn & Jeffri, 2003, as cited in

Berg, 2007, 44). A purposive sample refers to the intentional selection of research units based on specific traits and characteristics, rather than random selection (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003, 713, as cited in Teddlie & Fen 2007, 80). I aimed to recruit Syrian refugees who arrived to Canada within the last two years because they would retain vivid knowledge and memories about their lives in Syria before the outbreak of anti-Assad protests in 2011. I aimed to recruit a diverse sample in terms age, gender, profession, ethnicity, religious identity, and region of residence. These cross-differences reflect and influence peoples' experiences, needs, and perceptions. For example, women and youth experiences in zones of conflict may differ than adult males. Therefore, the study participants' perceptions of conflict, peacebuilding and reconciliation may reflect their gender, age, level of education, and professions. However, the twelve participants are not a representative sample of all Syrians living in Canada, or elsewhere, and thereby cannot be extrapolated to the wider Syrian communities. Notwithstanding, their experiences, and knowledge about the conflict sheds some light on Syrian peoples' needs, fears, hopes, and aspirations inside and outside Syria, and presents an alternative approach to end conflict, and transform it.

3.3 - Qualitative Research Approach

The usage of a particular research approach whether quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods neither infer that one method is better than others, nor does it mean that they are opposed to one another. Instead they should be understood as offering different methods to achieve different ends (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, 43-45; Newman & Benz, 1998 as cited in Creswell, 2014, 3). Creswell (2014, 3) argues that three factors determine

the selection of the research method; 1) the nature of the research problem or the issue being studied, 2) the researcher's experiences, 3) and the audiences for the study. The usage of the qualitative approach in this study is ordained by the nature of the research topic. Inquiring about the Syrian conflict, the experiences and stories of Syrian refugees, and their approaches to end the conflict, build sustainable peace, and transform relationships required that I used a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews guided by scripted and unscripted open-ended questions. This is because qualitative questions tend to create space for the generation of words and stories, while the interviewees provide rich details (Creswell, 2014, 4). Qualitative interviewing provides researchers with more flexibility than other methods and allows for the development of a thick description of the research issue building nuance and deepening understanding of an issue's complexities (Creswell, 2014). It also empowers participants by giving them the opportunity to have a say and to impact the research topic (Babbie & Benaquisto, 2010, 342; Bodgan & Biklen, 2007, 103). To have a better understanding of the research topic, and to explore the validity of the findings, this study recruited a diverse sample in terms of age, gender, profession, and region of residence in Syria (Triangulation) (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007, 115-116).

Qualitative interviewing is not a pragmatic methodology that seeks information from participants and treats them as a means to an end. In fact, it is a built relationship that must be nurtured, and sustained with grace (Mishler, 1986 as cited in Seidman, 2006, 95). From a moral standpoint, researchers must treat participants as ends in themselves, as subjects and agents of their own destiny (Kant, 2002, 229 as cited in Seidman, 2013, 141).

This study strives to embody the qualitative ethos outlined above while reflecting the PACS critical and emancipatory paradigm that focuses on local agency, empowerment, and inclusiveness of individual local voices in the decision-making and action-taking of peacebuilding processes (Mac Ginty, 2007; Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013; Richmond, 2014).

Research in social sciences serves primarily three common purposes: exploration, description and explanation (Babbie 1989, 80). Exploratory research is conducted when the research topic is relatively new, and unstudied, to satisfy the researcher's curiosity and desire for better understanding to test the feasibility of undertaking a more careful study, and/or whenever a researcher is breaking new ground (ibid, 80-81). This study seeks to explore the complexity of the Syrian conflict by highlighting the 12 Syrian refugees participants' perceptions of conflict, peacebuilding and reconciliation in post-peace accord Syria².

3.4 - Semi-Structured In-depth Individual Interviews on Sensitive Topics

Due to the nature of the research topic, I concluded that interviewing the twelve participants in a focus group setting might discourage them from sharing their experiences and expressing their true thoughts (see Bodgan & Biklen, 2007, 100). As such, individual interviews provided the interviewees with the opportunity to speak freely in a non-judgmental setting. It also empowered the interviewer to delve deeper into social and personal matters (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, 315).

² Darby (2001) uses the term "post-peace accord" in his book *The effects of Violence on Peace Processes* to refer to societies in transition to peace.

Semi-structured in-depth open-ended individual interviews are best suited to investigate sensitive topics if they are conducted in a face-to-face conversational setting because they empower the researcher to develop a rapport with participants, which thereby, enhances the researcher's access to the interviewees' lives (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007 as cited in Elmir, et. al., 2011, 13). In order to elicit the participants' level of engagement, I asked them unscripted follow-up probing questions to get at details and to seek clarifications (Seidman, 2006, 85-86). The ultimate goal of asking open-ended questions is to provide participants with the opportunity to provide responses that relate to their life experiences and stimulate a conversation-based interview.

Some research topics are sensitive by construct and require particular considerations from the researcher at the research question design stage and during the interview stage (see Bodgan & Biklen, 2007, 101). Cowles (1998), and Sieber and Stanley (1988) define sensitive topics as those that have the potential to cause physical, emotional, or psychological harm either to the participants or to the researcher (as cited in Elmir, et. al., 2011, 12). Moreover, Grotty (1998) argues for the merits of investigating sensitive topics stating that "the decision to interview people about sensitive topics stems from the epistemological and ontological stance that knowledge and reality can only be sought from those who experience it" (as cited in Elmir et al., 2011, 13). Therefore, researchers suggest numerous strategies to conduct research about sensitive topics with minimal risk in the following ways: first, it is important to build rapport, respect and trust with the participants (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009 as cited in Elmir, et. al., 2011, 12). Second, posing sensitive clear open-ended questions help to demonstrate care and empathy (Dickson-Swift, 2007, as cited in Elmir, et. al., 2011, 12). Third, self-disclosure

when disclosing an appropriate amount of information with participants is more likely to elicit the participants' engagement and create a less intimidating environment (Peters et al, 2009 as cited in Elmir, et. al., 2011, 14).

My primary role at the interview stage was to listen actively to the participants, and concentrate on what George Steiner (1998) calls the "inner voice" of interviewees, as opposed to an "outer-public voice" (as cited in Seidman, 2006, 78). Coming to the interview with an open-mind, listening actively to my research participants' stories, and respecting their narratives are the prerequisites that determined the dynamics of the interviews, and by extension, their successes or failures (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009 as cited in Elmir, et. al., 2011, 13; also see Berg, 2007, 130-131).

Social science researchers are, "products of their environments and therefore bring their assumptions and personal standpoints to the research enterprise" (Given, 2008, 60). Hence, researchers' positionalities (Reflexivity) such as preconceptions, worldviews, gender/ethnic identity, and class and cultural backgrounds tend to influence the research process during all of its stages, conceptualization, the gathering of data, the interpretation and dissemination of data. Van den Hoonaard (2012, 197) defines reflexivity as, "the process through which qualitative researchers examine and explain how they have influenced a research project through their social status, situation (gender, age, etc.), and the experiences they bring to the project." However, Malterud (2001, 484) contends that, "preconceptions are not the same as bias, unless the researcher fails to mention them."

I used my "quasi-outsider" positionality as a Moroccan-Canadian to create a relationship of trust, respect, and reliability with the participants in order to inspire them

to be transparent and share their own stories and opinions, as opposed to what their friends and relatives think/believe about the Syrian conflict (Seidman, 2006, 78; Seidman, 2000, as cited in Elmir, et. al., 2011, 13). The political stands and opinions of Syrians are driven by their ages, level of education, ethnicity, religious identity, and experiences of loss and hardships. Given this diversity and the sensitivity of the conversation, establishing a relationship of trust with participants was vital. In fact, at various points, some participants asked me a direct question, either in the beginning, the middle, or at the end of the interview, about my political stand and opinion about the ongoing conflict in Syria. The first time I was asked that question, I had a long, quiet moment of silence to reflect in order to provide an adequate response that neither opposed the interviewee's position nor validated it. Ultimately, I chose a neutral position, and tirelessly emphasized that my sole role at the interview stage was not to express my opinion or provide alternative responses to the interview questions, but to listen to the interviewees (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007, 100). Moreover, I had to assure them that their responses and opinions were going to be strictly confidential and their identity will be anonymous. As a PACS researcher, I advocate for peace, social justice, and condemn all forms of violence, exclusion and injustice. However, I was adamant not to disclose those personal beliefs/biases.

3.5 - Research Questions and Scope of the Study

I used face-to-face semi-structured interviews to collect data for this research study. The scripted interview questions (see Appendix 1) are broad and aimed to create a friendly conversational approach that empowered the research participants to speak freely

and it gave them a sense that they are valued partners in the research process, not merely subjects under investigation (Van den Hoonaard, 2015, 59). The scripted and unscripted questions did not incur a judgment/blaming tone of determining “why” but were, in fact, formulated as “how” questions (Van den Hoonaard, 2015, 58; see also Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, 48-52). The questions ultimately aimed to stimulate answers related to the participants’ approaches to end the Syrian conflict and transform it. Additionally, unscripted probing questions were used concurrently to seek further information and clarification from the participants.

All interviews were scheduled in advance and conducted at the most convenient time and location for the participants in order to assure their safety, including their privacy and confidentiality (McCosker et al., 2001; Spezial & Carpenter 2009 as cited in Elmir, et. al., 2011, 13). Eleven of the participants requested that the interview take place in their homes. Only one interview was conducted in my car in a remote place in front of the ocean because the interviewee has a large family and believed that we would not be able to have a space quiet enough to carry on our conversation smoothly. Ten of the interviews were audio recorded on a digital audio recorder, then transferred into my private password-protected computer. Two participants rejected audio recording and preferred my hand written responses of their interviews because they had the assumption that the Syrian security forces have incredible power that enables them to identify the voices of Syrians living abroad.

Since all of my interviewees arrived to Canada within the two years prior to the interview, all interviews were conducted in Arabic to ensure that they could speak freely. I translated and transcribed all of the interviews and stored them on my password

protected hard drive. I provided participants with a copy of the transcribed interview to read and suggest changes and/or to edit their responses. Recording interviews has numerous advantages: First, it captures the exact words of the participants, and second, it enables the interviews to be carried out smoothly because the interviewer does not need to request that the interviewees to speak slowly or repeat their statements. Third, it provides the interviewer with the opportunity to write notes and draft follow-up questions, which sustains the flow of the interview and gives it a conversational or storytelling style. Fourth, it empowers the interviewer to maintain eye contact with the interviewees to observe their body language and facial expressions, which also convey important information.

3.6 - The Study Participants' Profiles and Research Sites

I met each study participant on three separate occasions. At the first meeting, I provided them with the recruitment letter in English and Arabic that explained the topic of the research, as well as its goals and process (Appendix 2 and 3). I explained my ethics obligations as a researcher and their rights as participants, including their voluntary participation, and freedom to withdraw at any time from the study. After a few days of the initial contact, I contacted the participants to inquire about their final decision about participating in the study emphasizing the “voluntary participation clause” in the study. Ultimately, all of the participants agreed to move forward with the research. In fact, some participants said that it is their moral obligation to unveil what have happened in Syria. In the second meeting, I further explained the research topic and provided each participant with a copy of the written consent form in English and Arabic, and asked them to read it

carefully and to ask me any questions to clarify the information (Appendix 4, and 5). After the written consent forms were signed (Arabic and English versions), I started the interviews. Finally, prior to the third meeting, I contacted participants and provided them with a copy of the written interview transcription and asked them to read it carefully, highlighting information that they preferred to remove and/or modify. Both the audio recorded interviews and hand written notes were transcribed into text and stored on a password-protected computer. Signed consent forms notes were stored in a locked file cabinet in my home. Data will be deleted and shredded at the end of the project, approximately by August 31, 2019.

This study sought to recruit a diverse sample of participants that represent the subset of Syrian society in terms of age, gender, socioeconomic status, profession, ethnicity, and geographic representation (check the Table 1 below). The sample size of this study is 12 participants. They reside in various communities on Vancouver Island, namely, Victoria, Nanaimo, Parksville, LadySmith, and Duncan, BC, Canada. Conducting research in these communities neither infers any particularity of the five communities, nor reflects a particular quality of refugees who live there. Rather, it was convenient for me to conduct research there because they are near my home of residence in Victoria. In addition, including the five cities in the study will enhance the anonymity of the participants.

Syrian refugees have come to Canada under three different programs: as government-assisted refugees, and blended sponsored refugees. Between November 4th, 2015, and August 31st, 2018, 58,600 Syrian refugees arrived to Canada and settled in various communities across the country. 27,100 came as government-assisted refugees,

26,590 privately sponsored refugees, and 4,910 came as blended sponsored refugees. In particular, 4820 Syrian refugees settled in various communities in British Columbia, BC (Government of Canada, 2018). The total number of Syrian refugees in BC is relatively small compared to other provinces like Ontario that welcomed 25,810 (Government of Canada, 2018). Therefore, the Syrian refugees communities across BC are relatively small. For example, Since November 4, 2016, communities in Victoria, BC, have welcomed 351 Syrian refugees, and Nanaimo welcomed 57 refugees (Government of Canada, 2017). Due to the fact that these are such small communities, confidentiality and anonymity were key concerns for participants. To address this understandable concern, I provided participants with a list of random Arabic names that are common throughout the Arab world. I asked participants to choose their pseudonyms, which they felt comfortable with, when they signed the English and Arabic written consent forms. Giving them that right to chose a faux name provided them a sense of agency in the research, and fostered a bond of trust between each participant and me. In my phone calls with participants, and emails I used the participants' pseudonyms. Further, using direct quotes during the writing and dissemination of the study will not include any indications that might identify any of the research participants.

Table 1

Number of Participants		9			3		
Gender		Male			Female		
Age	20-30	30-40	40-50	50-70			
Number of Participants	4	3	4	1			
Residence in Syria	Idlib	Hama	Aleppo	Damascus	Homs	Latakia	Al-Hasakah
Number of Participants	3	2	2	1	1	1	1
Occupation	Dentist	Farmer	Student	Teacher	Worker	Retiree	Housewife

Number of Participants	2	3	2	1	1	2	1
-------------------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

3.7 - Data Analysis: Encoding and Memo Writing

At the data analysis and interpretation stage I used a Grounded Theory approach so that themes would emerge inductively from the data (Bogdan & Biklin, 2007, 159-170). Researchers are required to maintain the authenticity of the data, analyze the participants' responses, and search for themes. In other words, I am not supposed to control the data to fit particular theories, and reach predetermined conclusions. In fact, I have an obligation to "listen" carefully to the data (Van den Hoonaard, 2015, 68).

In this study, data analysis took place concurrently with data collection. This strategy enabled me to generate themes and questions to ask in future interviews, as well as realize data saturation if no new themes emerged (DiCicco-Bloom, & Crabtree, 2006, 317-318). This study utilized grounded theory coding to analyze the research data. Therefore, once data transcription was completed, I started memo-writing, initial encoding, and then focused encoding (Charmaz, 2014, 109).

Memos are an essential step in the research process. Lempert (2007, p. 245) states that, "memo writing is the methodological link, the distillation process, through which the researcher transforms data into theory... Memos are not intended to describe the social worlds of the researcher's data, instead they conceptualize the data in narrative form." Similarly, coding is a learning research skill. It represents a pivotal link between data collection and analysis. At this stage, researchers ask analytic questions and try to make sense of the data in order to develop a theory. In other words, coding means, "naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and

accounts for each piece of data. With grounded theory coding, you move beyond concrete statements in the data to making analytic sense of stories, statements, and observations” (Charmaz, 2014, 111).

The encoding journey takes two forms: first, in the initial coding phase, the researcher remains close to the data and the participants’ views without any form of interference. Second, in the in-depth coding phase, the researcher focuses on the major themes and patterns that emerge inductively from the transcripts (Charmaz, 2014, 113).

Grounded theory is not a linear method. In fact, it is an iterative, comparative, and interactive method that prompts a researcher to engage closely with data and go beyond the casual reading of the data content in order to develop new theories and concepts (Charmaz, 2014, 115-116). As such, data analysis in this study has gone through a rigorous process. Given that I translated and transcribed the interviews, and proof read them, I developed a close proximity with the data that enabled me to distinctly identify all of the participants’ stories. After the completion of the final draft of the transcription, I printed them and conducted content analysis using a coloured marker to inductively generate the major themes. After multiple readings of each printed transcription, I realized data saturation and started writing the major themes and sub-themes, dividing them into three qualitative chapters.

3.8 - Ethical Commitments

All professions enact codes of ethical conduct that promote honesty, respect, fairness, and integrity. Therefore, in this study I adhered to the utmost ethical research principles listed in Canada’s official ethical research guide, the Tri-Council Policy

Statement (TCPS) (Van den Hoonaard, 2015, 55-56). I committed to respect the participants as individuals, as well as their privacy, safety, welfare, and dignity, and to treat them fairly during all stages of this study. I committed to safeguarding their confidentiality and anonymity. At the thesis completion and possible publication stage of the study's findings, I am committed to maintaining these standards. The published study will not include any sort of indicators that may identify the participants. Additionally, once the study is published, I will not contact the participants to re-discuss the content of their responses.

3.9 - Conclusion

Due to the fact that the Syrian conflict is an outcome of a complex set of factors, it is readily apparent that using a set of direct scripted questions would not provide participants the opportunity to talk freely and share their experiences, hopes, fear, losses, and challenges – something which understanding their analyses of the conflict and their imaginings of its resolutions would require. As such, the use of semi-structured individual interviews as a research methodology fit with the nature of the study and the needs of the participants. In addition, conducting research about sensitive topics such as political issues is challenging, especially with participants from countries ruled by authoritarian regimes. Group interviews would be likely to discourage them from disclosing their true personal views and positions. In contrast, individual interviews provide participants the sense of safety to express their own views without fear of being labeled or judged.

CHAPTER FOUR: SYRIA BEFORE CONFLICT

4.1 - Introduction

This chapter presents the study participants' life experiences and socioeconomic living standards in Syria before the eruption of the 2011 anti-government protests, and the impact of those sociopolitical conditions on conflict eruption, as well as its escalation into a protracted sectarian civil war. In order to establish the context of the study, I started the interviews with an introductory general question: can you describe Syria before the 2011 protests, during the armed struggle and now? (Appendix 1)

Since the general theme of the interview questions reflects conflict transformation, peacebuilding, and reconciliation, I did not intend to delve into the causes of the Syrian Conflict. However, since all of the interviewees' responses to the introductory question provided detailed valuable insights that highlight the hidden socioeconomic and political conditions that contributed to the eruption of the anti-Assad protests, I found it necessary to allocate the first empirical chapter to Syria's socioeconomic and political conditions before the conflict outbreak in 2011. The participants' narratives in this chapter reflect their stories and meaning making (insiders' knowledge) of what have happened in Syria since 2011. And through an accurate understanding of their narratives and perceptions, we acquire the ability to understand the conflict, and ultimately transform it. For example, Senehi (2009, 203) asserts "storytellers often invoke the past to comment on problems and needs in the present in order to affect the future."

Seven themes emerged inductively from the stories and experiences of the study participants, namely: 1) Syria's economic living standards, 2) Intergroup relationships, 3)

Sectarianism as a state policy, 4) Nepotism, corruption, and abuse of power, 5) Political violence and a culture of fear, 6) Arab Spring uprising, and 7) International politics: Syria as an arena of a proxy war.

4.2 - Syria's Economic Living Standards-- *“Before the 2011 protests, Syria's economy was relatively good.” Majd.*

In general, most participants reported that living standards in Syria before the 2011 anti-government protests were relatively good. They used the following phrases: “the economy was good,” “the economy was stable,” “we were surviving,” “we did not have people who would sleep without dinner,” and “we had safety and security.” However, there were participants who reported the high cost of living and a rise in the rate of poverty in the country. Professionals, entrepreneurs, and residents of urban regions lived a considerably comfortable life style compared to their fellow citizens who had a limited income such as low-ranking government servants, retirees, labourers, and residents of remote rural regions. Remarkably, in 2010, upper-class Syrian families employed between 75,000-100,000 domestic workers from Southeast Asia (Mehchy & Mahdi Doko, 2010, 2). Therefore, it is important to note that the participants' responses reflected their socioeconomic statuses, professions, and the nature of their region of residence.

Between 2000 and 2010, Syria's gross domestic product (GDP) grew from \$19.326 billion to \$40.405 billion in 2007 (World Bank, 2018). Also, its real GDP growth rose from 2.3 percent in 2000 to 4.4 percent in 2010, and for the same period, its inflation rate increased from negative -3.9 percent (deflation) to 2.8 percent (IMF Data Mapper, 2017). In addition, the national debt in relation to the GDP decreased from 152

percent of GDP to 32 percent in 2010 (IMF, 2010). Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita rose between 2000 and 2010 from \$1202.89 to \$2806.89 (IMF, 2010).

Therefore, based on the annual economic reports of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund between 2000 and 2011, Syria's economy was stable and had positive indications for healthy growth as the government reduced the national debt in relation to GDP, increased income per capita, and maintained a healthy inflation rate under 3 percent. Kamal who was working as a dentist in [governorate A] notes:

Before 2011, Syria was good: economically, Syria was developing. The economic growth was remarkable; the annual income of every household increased, every household had a car. In recent years, Syrians were able to afford to buy new cars. People were living a decent life. Generally, Syria had a decent and stable economic growth. All people were surviving; we had a free education system, and free health care system.

Likewise, Abu Houssam who was also a dentist working in [governorate B] echoed Kamal's assessment, stating:

Personally, I was doing well. I was self-sufficient. I had my work. I had my own clinic, and also worked in a government-managed hospital. I lived a simple life as a middle-class family. Everything was affordable; prices of goods were relatively cheap compared to other countries. The average monthly income of public servants before 2011 was around 15.000 Lira, which equals to around \$300 US. People were living relatively well.

Abu Hassan who was a farmer in [governorate C] had similar thoughts. He stated the following in his story:

Life in Syria before the anti-government protests was good. For my family, and me life was good; I had a farm and goods, my elder children had graduated from university and were working, and my younger children were still in schools. Overall, with praise to God, we were surviving.

In general, Syria's economy was stable and reflected healthy growth. Nonetheless, the economic pie was not distributed equally. In 2009, average monthly salary was \$242, but

low skilled laborers, farmers earned significantly less than average, an estimated of \$109 or less (De Chantel, 2014, 526). Thus, they encountered economic difficulty and did not benefit equally from Syria's last decade of economic growth. Abu Yahia a veteran from the [governorate D] discussed the economic inequality between the lower and upper income classes:

Economically, people who had jobs were surviving, and those who did not have a secured source of income were struggling. The average income in Syria was 6000 to 7000 Lira. Therefore, 3/4 of Syrians were on or under the line of average income. Above average incomes were few, and the upper class represented a small portion of society.

Likewise, Abu Sakker, a retired engineer and a former member of the state political party, the Ba'ath party, from the [governorate E] discussed the economic hardship that public servants and retirees faced in Syria due to their limited income and high cost of living:

Syria was a stable country. Its economy was good [...] In the beginning people wanted political and economic reform; before the protests, the average income for public servants was \$150 dollars per month, but the cost of living was very expensive. People who had a fixed source of income encountered economic difficulty. However, entrepreneurs, merchants, and individuals who had trade were benefiting from the economic liberation.

Economic development scholars such as Amartya Sen and Mahbub ul Haq (2010) affirm that the annual GDP growth does not provide an accurate picture of the economic well-being of countries, unless the national wealth is distributed equally between all social classes. Numerous Global South countries achieve very high and consistent economic growth. Nonetheless, they still have high rates of poverty, illiteracy, poor living and health standards, and income inequality. For example, despite Syria's economic growth in the first decade of Assad presidency (2000-2010), Syria's ranking in the UN Human Development Index was 111 between 169 countries in 2010. In fact, Syria's rank

decreased three points between 2005 and 2010 (Human Development Index Report, 2010, 13).

Further, according to the Human Development Index 2010 report (p. 16), Gross National income per capita in 2008 in Syria was \$4760. Yet, the country ranked 85 among 169 countries in income equality and 103 in the gender equality index. Hana from the [governorate F], a housewife, and a mother to four young children discusses the rise of cost of living and low purchasing capacity of low-income families:

Before 2011, the prices of goods were expensive beyond the purchasing capacity of poor people. Prices of basic goods and services were rising very high, and our income was stagnating. People were wondering how could they survive with the rise of prices, pay the rent of their homes, and provide for their children to live a decent life? Therefore, everyone revolted in rejection of the living conditions. People lost their patience and broke their silence. People believed that they deserved to live a better life. Everything that happens has causes: poverty and rejection of the living conditions drove people to revolt collectively in protests. There were people who believed that if they protest, the government would reform and make things better, but our president chose not to do anything.

Economic disparity exists in different levels in all societies; thus it is the government's obligation to develop policies that address economic inequality, tackle poverty, and create the conditions for economic mobilization to all its citizens. Nonetheless, there are always winners who benefit from those policies, and losers. Bashar Assad's market oriented reform policies benefited the middle and upper classes, professionals, and merchants; meanwhile it harmed low-income class, and rural populations. Such outcome further deteriorated due to the successive years of drought since 2006 onwards.

4.3 - Collective Identity: Intergroup Relationships- *“Before 2011, we were aware about our differences, but we chose to live peacefully with mutual respect. Today, sectarianism appeared to surface with its ugly face.” Kamal.*

Syria is a mosaic society; it is constituted of multiple religious groups (Christians, Muslims, Assyrians, Druze, and Yazidi), religious sects (Sunni, Alawites, Shia, Ismaili), and ethnic groups (Arabs, and Kurds) that coexisted peacefully for centuries. As discussed in the context chapter, intergroup tension/conflict existed throughout the country’s modern history. However, ordinary Syrians tended to dismiss it either un/intentionally, or unconsciously. For example, intergroup tension in Syria can be traced back to Christian-Maronites and Druze violent conflict in 1860, which developed into a full-scale war (McHugo, J. 2015, 47). The historic narratives of ordinary people do not necessarily depict historical facts. Nonetheless, those shared narratives and perceptions determine the sustainability of peace in divided societies. For instance, Abu Sakker, a retired engineer in his 70’s from [governorate E], stresses the characteristic of peaceful intergroup co-existence in Syria before 2011:

People in Syria lived in peace for thousands of years. The origin of civilization started in Syria. We have many recognized and unrecognized minorities in Syria. Before 2011, people did not consider intergroup differences in their daily interpersonal interactions and business dealings. We were living in harmony in villages and neighborhoods.

Likewise, Abu Yahia a veteran in his late 50’s from [governorate D] noted the following in his narrative:

In Syria, we did not have sectarianism; our fathers and grandfathers never mentioned sectarianism. In fact, my father told me that under the French colonization, Syrians were united. In Syria, each ethnic group has its leaders. They led their people and resolved disputes. I never heard my father and grandfather saying this person is Alawites and that person is Druze.

All of the study participants share the idyllic memories of intergroup peaceful co-habitation. Nonetheless, despite the perception of intergroup peaceful co-existence, territorial segregation remained a common norm in Syria and other Middle Eastern countries (McHugo, J. 2015, 43). Kamal noted that territorial segregation is more common in rural and semi-urban communities, as well as in middle and low-income neighborhoods in cities. This is what he had to say on the issue:

In my hometown, all residents were Christians. Our town is still surrounded by Sunni towns. Before the 2011 uprising and its escalation to war, we lived in peace and fraternity with Sunnis. We had very good relationships with our Sunni neighbors. For example, we used to celebrate all together during happy times like marriage ceremonies, and grieve altogether during sadness like death. My town was the economic center that served the needs of the surrounding towns. Our town's total population was around 12,000, and the surrounding towns, each one had an average of 3,000 people. They used to come to our town to trade and buy goods and services. We all interacted in a friendly manner and treated each other with respect ... there were Christian towns, Sunni towns, Alawites towns, Kurdish towns, Shia towns, and Druze towns. Even in cities, there were neighborhoods that were known to be Christian, Alawites, and Sunni. That segregation was remarkable in low income and middle-income neighborhoods. However, upper-upper class neighborhoods were mixed, because the economic and political elites did not care much about their religious affiliation.

Oum Hanin a farmer and a housewife in her 60s from [governorate D] describes the relationship between her Sunni majority community and a neighboring Shia majority community as peaceful and cooperative. This is what she had to say on the issue:

The majority of my hometown residents were Sunni Muslims. We all knew each other. But there was a town close to us that had Shia majority residents. They were our colleagues, and friends. For example, in their community they did not have a high school. Therefore, their children used to move to our community to continue their education. There was no differential treatment. We had a normal relationship with them. We did not recognize the sectarian differences. We looked to them as Arab Syrians like us. We saw them as equals. We did not categorize individuals to be Sunnis and Shia.

However, there were exceptions to intergroup territorial segregation where intergroup members co-habited in the same community. Abu Hassan a farmer in his 60s from [governorate C] describes the demographic composition of his community and intergroup relationships in the following manner:

In the governorate of [name], we are from a small town called [Name of town]; the town's total population was nearly 12,000 habitants, 4,000 were Alawites, and 8,000 were Sunni Muslims. We had an excellent relationship. No one from both communities had any animosities or committed hostile actions towards the other. We were living in peace altogether. We were living a simple life with respect and kindness.

The peaceful intergroup co-existence in society at the individual level also took the form of cooperation, interdependence and social solidarity. Additionally, Abu Hassan articulated the following in his story:

We cooperated and treated each other with kindness. For example, if I wanted to farm a part of my land, I asked an Alawites farmer who own a tractor to help me. I have a farm and when I get crops at the end of the year, I used to sell them as wholesale to an Alawite merchant. I did not have any problems. We did not have any sensitivity. We used to interact and do business without thinking about the sectarianism. We used to interact as individuals free from sectarianism. We did not wear hats on our heads that say this person is Alawites, or Sunni, or Druze.

Oum Hamam who was also a farmer from [governorate C] similarly lived in a mixed community that contained Alawites and Sunni residents. She described the intergroup relationship before the 2011 protests as excellent. Both groups in her community, Alawites and Sunni individuals, celebrated altogether in joyful events like weeding parties, and grieved together during death incidents:

Honestly, the relationship was excellent. There was no difference between Alawites, Druze, and Sunni. There was no division. Everything was normal. When the Alawites had a wedding, all the Sunnis joined them to celebrate. Likewise, when there were funerals we supported one another. The Alawites were our neighbors. We had an excellent relationship with them.

The participants' quotes above describe intergroup relationships in rural and semi-rural regions. However, Abu Sakker who lived in an urban context in [governorate E] echoed the same experience. He averred that Syria was peaceful before the protests:

Before the protests in 2011 Syrians were living in peace and harmony. We did not care, or bother to ask about the ethnic or religious backgrounds of people. We lived in the same buildings and neighborhoods, and worked in the same places. We used to visit each other, and support one another during times of happiness such as weddings, and hard times such as death and grief. I personally had friends who were Alawites, Druze, and Christians ... Syrians practiced the proverb that says, *A dine lelah, wa lwatan liljamea*. (Faith is to God, but the nation is for everyone.)

All participants assert that at the individual level (interpersonal relationships, Syrians regarded each other as fellow citizens (neighbors, colleagues, and friends) without ethnic, religious and sectarian identities. They were aware about each other's identities. However, they did not recognize them in their daily interactions and business dealings. Those identities were neither used as labels, nor as a standard for preferential treatment.

Abu Yahia from [governorate D] stated the following in his narrative:

Before the uprising, intergroup social relationships were very good. No one knew or recognized sectarianism in Syria. The regime created and fostered the sense of sectarianism during the uprising. We were not raised to treat people according to their religious affiliation; we did not differentiate between this Sunni and that one Druze, and other Alawites. No, I personally have friends who are Druze, Christians, Shia, and Alawites. We were engaged socially and had a good relationship. We did not have discrimination or sectarianism whatsoever in society. We did not feel, or recognize the individual's ethnic background. We did not know sectarianism in society.

Likewise, Hassan Talib from [governorate F] describes intergroup relationships through his experience during the compulsory military service in the following manner:

Before 2011, there was no sectarianism; during the compulsory military service, we met people from all regions in Syria, we did not identify them, or call them by their religious beliefs. But we identified them by their region of residence. So we would say, this person is from Deer Zoor, that person is from Homs, that person is from Damascus, that person is from Daraa, and so

on and so forth. Religious identity was not used to identify people. There was no sectarianism at all. Sectarianism was used as a tool/tactic during the protests and troubles of 2011.

On the other hand, Kamal explicitly attributes the intergroup peaceful co-existence to the Assad regime's education policy and coercive security measures that banned the use of religious identity in the public discourse. He noted the following in his story:

In schools, they did not teach us sectarianism and religious identity. However, in university, I experienced sectarianism; as I said earlier, I am Christian, but my name is a Muslim. Therefore, I used to build close friendships with Sunni friends, but when they found out that I am Christian, they used to withdraw from the bond of friendship and treat me merely as a colleague. Therefore, I automatically started to look for friends in the university who are Christians. What I want to say is, sectarianism existed in peoples' minds, it was there, but it was hidden. No one could use a sectarian basis to abuse or discriminate outgroup members.

Additionally, Kamal said that,

People had the freedom to dress according to their beliefs and customs, not according to rules imposed by the government. The Assad regime did not allow religious identity to be used in society; no one was allowed to talk about religious identity. The most popular mottos were, "religion for God, and the motherland is for everyone," "*A Dine Li Allah, Wa Lwatan Liljamaie*", "faith means kindness and good dealings", "*A Dine Mo'amala*"...Before 2011, we were aware about our differences, but we chose to live peacefully with mutual respect. We were aware about traditional and custom differences. For example, some of our traditions and practices as Syrians Christians are different than other groups; they might not accept our traditions. However, no one could say it publically. For example, as Christians we used to celebrate Christmas, have a tree in the house and organize parties. Some people might have disapproved of the Christmas celebration. But, no one could have the courage to say it publically. They might say that privately; in a very private setting, because what they say could be reported to the secret intelligence forces.

Participants who were young students before the 2011 uprising affirm that they were not aware of sectarianism. Abu Riyad who was a high school student in 2011 in [governorate D] stated that people treated each other with respect:

As students we did not know what it means being Shia? What it means being Alawites? And what it means being Christian? We did not know that. We saw each other as Syrians; we saw each other as friends. There was no difference between a Shia person, and a Christian person; there was nothing of that. In my school, we had Shia and Alawites teachers, we never judged them, or treated them differently because of their group affiliation. The relationship was very normal. In my school, we had a teacher, he taught us for three years, but no one knew that he was Alawites. No one cared to ask you what your religious group affiliation/faith is. No one could get involved in your faith. We were all brothers and friends.

Likewise, Khaled who was a high school student in [governorate C] before the 2011 protests noted Syrians were not interested to explore each other's identities:

Before 2011, people did not care to ask you about your faith and religious beliefs. People would never ask you if you are Druze, Alawites, or Christian. In my school, I had teachers who are Alawites and Christians. I knew about their faith after the eruption of the protests and troubles. Before the revolution, people treated one another equally; they treated each other like they are one people with one religion. They did not ask about the person's faith and his religious affiliation. However, after the revolution, and since president Bashar Assad is Alawites, he protected the people of his group, Shia supported him and stood with him. So, they started killing the protesters. Therefore, people started to hate each other; Sunnis hated Alawites, and Alawites hated Sunnis.

In contrast, participants who lived in Alawites majority regions reported that the manifestations of sectarian tension existed primarily between Alawites and Arab Sunnis. Majd who grew up in [governorate G] (mainly Arab Sunni, Kurds, Christians population), and studied in Latakia governorate (Alawites majority population) claims that Arab Sunnis had formidable relationships with all Syria's ethnic groups, except, with Alawites:

Overall, there was a good relationship between people regardless of the group affiliation. However, there were always tensions between Alawites and Sunnis. I lived in an Alawites majority region in Latakia governorate [Alawites majority governorate] and I have encountered intergroup tension. In contrast, if you go to other governorates such as Al-Hasakah, Tabakah, Rakah, and Idlib, Sunnis lived peacefully with other groups such as Christians. They respected each other and there were no problems

whatsoever. There is amity between them as they live in fraternity and friendship. But, in Latakia there was always tension. In fact tension existed in Alawites majority provinces, Latakia, Tartous, and Jiblah. In Alawites towns you will not find residents from other groups. Alawites live in isolation in their communities. It is very rare to find residents from other groups that live in Alawites majority communities. Sectarianism was not very evident before 2011.

Likewise, Abu Houssam, a dentist, who lived in an Alawites majority [governorate B], had the same perception noticing that relations were very good between ethno-religious groups:

Well, as neighbors, there was good relationships between neighbors even though they were from different groups. However, it was known that particular regions are specific for Alawites, and others for Sunnis. There was some sort of segregation. The relationship between Christians and Sunni was very good compared to their relationship with Alawites. Christians were closer to Sunnis than to Alawites.

The intergroup peaceful co-existence and cooperation remained intact in the first months of the anti-Assad regime protests. Intergroup members who had close friendships offered help and protection to each other. However, as the conflict escalated, conflict protagonists dominated the scene and implanted sentiments of intergroup mistrust and animosity. Oum Hanin noted the following in her story:

My husband had a good friend who was Shia. Once, we had a financial difficulty; so, he offered my husband financial assistance. My nephew had a Shia friend who lived in the [neighboring] majority Shia town. When the Assad forces started to bombard us in our town, he offered my nephew assistance, he told him bring your family to our town, I will find a house for you. You will be safe with us because the regime will never attack us.

The manipulation of religious/sectarian identity shifted the conflict from political armed struggle into a sectarian-based conflict (ethnopolitical conflict). Abu Riyad a young student from [governorate D] asserts that the intervention of Hezbollah, Lebanese Shia

militia in Syria to support Assad regime contributed to the deterioration of intergroup relationships, implanted intergroup mistrust, and fostered the use of violence:

In the first few months of the troubles, the relationship between Alawites and Shia, and Sunnis was still good. For the first three months and before the military intervention and the use of force against protesters, Sunnis, Alawites, and Shia were still one hand. We were all still friends; we had a very strong relationship. When the regime started striking anti-regime regions, our Alawites friends invited us to their homes, and towns. But when Hezbollah and other [external] Shia militias intervened militarily in Syria, they concentrated in the Shia and Alawites towns; so, when Sunnis individuals went to the Shia towns [for refuge] they got arrested and kidnapped. Before the protests, there was no tension whatsoever between Sunnis on one hand, and Shia and Alawites on the other hand. For seven months since the start of the protests, there was not any tension, but when Hezbollah forces, and the Ba'ath party followers concentrated in the Shia towns, tension started and escalated between Sunnis and Shia.

As the conflict escalated and continued, warring parties manipulated sectarian identities, and used sectarianism as an instrument to justify violence, discredit adversaries, and secure in-group support and commitment. Hassan Talib argues that identity was used as a tool to intensify the protests:

Sectarianism negatively affected the intergroup relationships during the anti-Assad protests. Sectarianism was used as a tool; they manipulated the groups. For example, if a Sunni is killed, they say that the perpetrator is Alawites. Likewise, if an Alawites is killed, they say the perpetrator is Sunni. They emphasized the group affiliation of both the victim and perpetrator to intensify the crisis.

Given that the number of attendees to the Friday prayer in mosques is large in all Arab-Muslim countries, activists during the Arab Spring uprising used the Friday prayer, particularly, the aftermath of the prayer as an opportunity to mobilize large scale protests. For example, Hassan Talib observed the following in his narrative about intergroup tensions:

In [name of city], in the early days of protests, we used to have protests only on Fridays. However, on the other days of the week, life was normal, people

used to go to their work regularly. But, slowly, the situation intensified and troubles increased. On Fridays after the prayer, we used to see one person or two stand up inside the mosque and suddenly shout loudly, “we want the regime’s removal” which other people who attended the prayer used to record through smartphones. That’s how things started and spread. People were divided into three groups, anti-Assad, pro-Assad, and ordinary people who wanted to just live in peace and survive. I personally left Syria when the situation intensified, particularly, after four months from the occurrence of the Aleppo incident.

Hence, Kamal argues that the launch of anti-government protests from Sunni mosques after every Friday prayer promoted sectarianism in Syria by giving the protests the appearance of being “Sunni protests” against the Alawites regime. In other words, he claims that since the protests started from within Sunni mosques and were led by Sunni activists, automatically non-Sunni Syrians were excluded from participation:

In my opinion, the protests promoted sectarianism. I think the method of protesting against the regime was wrong. The fact that all protests started from mosques, and after every Friday prayer gave the impression that Sunni Muslims are against the regime. The fact that protests started from the mosques excluded the non-Muslim Syrians who might be anti-regime as well. So, the eruption of the protests from the mosques and after the prayers gave the uprising a sectarian characteristic. We are all as Syrians against corruption and injustice. We did not like corrupted individuals. Indeed, so many government officials were corrupted. For example, the judges who are supposed to maintain the scale of justice, some of them were corrupted and took bribes. In my opinion, the protests should have emerged from universities and colleges, because students are educated and sincerely seek reform. However, those who triggered the protests and recruited them to revolt were paid by foreign powers, namely Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

Framing intergroup conflict in a sectarian way and using axiological terms can be used to justify violence and the extermination of outgroup members (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2011, 88; Korostelina, 2011, 104). In this process, religion loses its peaceful component and becomes a source of legitimacy for violence. In other words, it played the same role of “cultural violence” that justifies the occurrence of violence against a particular group (Galtung, 1996). Oum Hanin from [governorate D] affirms that before 2011, Shia and

Sunnis in her community co-existed peacefully. However, as the conflict escalated, sectarian identity was used to defame outgroup members and justify violence against them. As she noted, killing outgroup members was promoted as a ritual/prerequisite to enter to heaven:

Before the protests and early days of the troubles, we had a good relationship with Shia. We did not know sectarianism; we did not have discrimination or preferential treatment. All people were treated as Syrians. But later on, they implanted mistrust between us, between Sunni and Shia. Members of both parties believed that killing members of the other party would grant them entrance to heaven. They implanted mistrust among us.

Abu Sakker, a former member of the Ba'ath party, asserts that the Assad regime manipulated sectarianism and represented Sunni rebels as an immanent threat not only to Shia and Alawites, but also to other minority groups to discredit their cause and mobilize Alawites and Shia support in Syria against allegedly Sunni-led protests. Also, Assad's successive labeling of the conflict as a sectarian conflict, as opposed to a mere sociopolitical conflict for political reform/change granted him the support of Iran that proclaims to be the protectorate of Shia minorities. He noted the following in his story:

The regime created sectarianism and promoted it. The regime promoted itself as a protector of minorities from the Sunni majority. The regime manipulated the anti-government protests; it represented the protests and revolution as a war against Alawites and Shia people. Therefore, Assad requested the support of the Shia regime in Iran. As a result, the conflict in Syria shifted to a sectarian war.

As the conflict escalated, intergroup antagonism and mistrust dominated the scene. All participants asserted that sectarianism was hidden in society before the 2011 anti-government protests. However, the transformation of anti-government protests into anti-Assad protests, and the shift from calls for reform under Assad regime continuity into regime change led to conflict escalation and the manipulation of sectarian identity in

order to discredit the legitimacy of protesters, and mobilize support for the Assad regime, particularly, from Alawites, and Shia Syrians.

4.4 - Sectarianism As a State Policy- *“In reality the Assad regime used religious identity as a prerequisite to appointment in the most strategic positions in the state.”* Kamal.

From both interviewee reports and corroborated evidence, it is clear that the Assad regime used sectarian identity as a prerequisite for appointments to high profile positions in the government, military, and security forces; particularly, in the most senior and strategic portfolios. Abu Yahia, a veteran, from [governorate D] noted the following in his narrative:

Before to 2011, sectarianism was not on the surface in the Syrian society, except in the military. In the military, Alawites officers were treated differently than Sunni officers. However, in civil society sectarianism was not recognized.

Likewise, Hassan Talib from [governorate F] echoed the same sentiment stating that sectarianism existed before the 2011 protests in terms of who occupied higher-level positions in military, and government apparatuses.

Sectarianism existed before 2011. All people who occupied the most strategic positions were Alawites. But, ordinary people lived peacefully. Sectarianism did not exist between ordinary people. Ordinary people were busy working to survive. The real power in Syria is in the hands of Alawites people, Alawites occupy the most powerful positions in the state apparatuses. The highest position a Sunni officer is allowed to reach in the military is a General, and afterwards he will be forced to retirement. Alawites are the minority in Syria, but they are in charge of everything, whatever they want gets reflected in practice. Nothing will happen without their willingness.

Abu Houssam from the majority Alawites [governorate B], stated the following in his story:

Nearly 90% of Alawites are pro-Assad. The Assad regime claims that it is the protector of Alawites; meanwhile, the majority of Alawites were benefiting from ruling of the Assad regime. All the privileges were granted to them.

Everything was for them. The majority of Alawites were employed in the security forces and military. They were the main military officers. Alawites were interconnected, and they supported each other because they own the authority.

Hafez Assad's regime was aware about Syria's ethnic and demographic structures. Therefore, he attracted Sunni Arab elites to occupy leadership positions in the national and regional administration apparatuses to appease Arab Sunnis and avoid social upheavals. Nonetheless, in reality, the real power was at the hands of Alawites officials. In other words, Arab Sunnis were the regime's façade, however, Alawites officials were the *de facto* executives. Kamal, a Christian dentist, from [governorate A] articulated that the Alawites were in positions of power so they controlled the most influential political and military portfolios in the state:

The real power was in the hands of Alawites, in other words, Alawites were sectarian, but they could not admit that. In fact, they gave the impression that they treat everyone as equal in order to get the approval of the public. But in reality, the real power was in the hands of Alawites. For example, there were Sunni governors of the governorates; so, people would say the governor is a Sunni, but the deputy governors in those provinces would be Alawites. The real power was in the hands of the deputy governor. The governor was just a front; he signs the papers and artificially manages the governorate. Likewise, in the military, if the head of a military brigade were a Sunni general, his assistant would be Alawites. The power was in the hand of the Alawites officers ... The Assad regime claimed to be secular in order to neutralize Sunnis and dismiss their claim that they have the right to be in power because they are the majority. But in reality, the Assad regime used religious identity as a prerequisite for appointment to the most strategic positions in the state. In order to hold the highest positions you had to be an Alawites, and if you are not Alawites you will need to prove your loyalty and commitment to the regime.

Hafez Assad created a special version of "balance and check" to safeguard his regime from unpredictable military coups, which involves the careful inclusion of Sunnis in strategic positions. Indeed, Arab Sunnis represented a sizeable portion of the military.

However, the final decision-making was at the hands of Alawites officers as Abu Yahia, a veteran, recognized as follows:

Even in the military we were not able to make a move. The regime gave privileges to Alawites officers. Druze, Christian and Sunni officers did not enjoy the same privileges that their Alawites and Shia counterparts have. For example, an Alawites Lieutenant Officer had more power than a Sunni Major Officer. It was clear that the real power was in the hands of Alawites.

Also, sectarianism was used as a prerequisite for hiring civilians into leadership positions.

Abu Sakker asserts that hiring Alawites individuals was a form of a “state policy:”

The Assad regime promoted sectarianism and discrimination; it preferred Alawites people over individuals from other groups. Alawites people had the upper hand in government, and got the most influential government positions. However, in society people lived with one another in harmony.

Abu Houssam, a dentist from [governorate B] shared his own experience once he graduated from dentistry school and was seeking job opportunities in public hospitals:

In Syria, in my profession, dentistry, whoever graduates with higher grades, gets hired automatically in hospitals as public servants. I graduated with higher grades, and applied three times, but I was rejected. However, my Alawites colleagues who graduated with me and had lower grades than me succeeded and got hired. What happened was that the person who was responsible for submitting the applicants’ files to Damascus the capital, did not submit my application. They used to pick and choose the files, which applications to send. The fourth time, I applied online; it was new at the time. I did not need to go through a third party medium. So, no one could get my file and hide it. After I got accepted, the police conducted a thorough investigation about me. Whatever you need to do in Syria you will be investigated by the security forces.

The Assad regime’s use of sectarianism as a state policy in recruitment for government, military, and security positions created shared collective grievances amongst Arab Sunnis, especially military officers. Therefore, as confrontations between protesters and security forces escalated in the early months of the anti-government protests, dozens of Sunni military officers defected and eventually created the opposition Free Syrian Army

(FSA) and joined or formed rebel groups. Kamal discussed the significance of the Sunni's in creating the FSA in the following manner:

I do understand why some military officers defected and joined the Free Army; I am not surprised. Indeed, there was injustice; Sunni officers did not have the privileges that their Alawites counterparts had. Sunni officers had economic struggles. However, Alawites officers had economic privileges and authority. For example, the Alawites officer would drive a nice car; however, the Sunni officer would have a bad quality car, or even take the bus. Myself, if I were a military officer and experienced injustice, I would have joined the Free Army in hope to change the status quo.

Abu Yahia argues that the Assad regime created a sectarian national military that preferred to stand up with the regime, instead of the Syrian people. Therefore, he claims that if the Syrian military acted like the Egyptian military and stood up in support for protesters, the Syrian conflict would not have reached today's dramatic outcome:

We need a national military that stands with the people, not a military that stands with the president against the people. Syrian personnel, our cousins, and brothers build the Syrian army, and their salaries are paid by the people. Therefore, they need to stand up with the people. If that happened, the president will not abuse his powers. The army would intervene and force him to step down. The military will remove one person, not kill the people. In Egypt, the military stood with Egyptian protesters, which ended the conflict and created the basis of political change. Egypt was saved from destruction because of the Egyptian military's decision.

The use of sectarian identity as a prerequisite to hiring and promotion in the state and military apparatuses, and gain privileges, power and status creates a shared perception of injustice, and grievances amongst the outcaste group members. That perception of injustice takes the form of a collective rejection of the status quo either in peaceful non-violent means as happened in early weeks of the uprising in Syria, and/or uses violence to change the entire system.

4.5 - Nepotism, Corruption, and Abuse of Power- *“Bashar Assad used his family to control Syria at all levels. Politically, his family members held the most powerful positions.” Abu Sakker*

Syria is known as the “Syrian Arab Republic” in the international community. Yet, since Hafez Assad seized power, in a coup d’état in 1970, he strived to establish a hereditary political regime, making the country far from the connotations of what a republic typically entails. In fact, Assad created an autocratic regime and claimed absolute control for himself and his successor. The self-designed 1970 constitution granted him the most powerful positions as he was both the president and the head chairman of the Ba’ath state-party. Hafez Assad created a circle of loyalists, and eliminated individuals who questioned his leadership. Abu Sakker, former member of Ba’ath party in his 70’s, describes the iteration of the regime in the following way:

At the time of Hafez Assad, a Member of Parliament asked the president, “Where are the revenues from oil? And why does the government not include them in the revenues section of the budget?” Assad responded to the MP saying, “Do not worry, they are in safe hands.” Afterwards, that MP disappeared, and no one knew where the regime put him. Therefore, no one had the courage to speak up, or criticize the regime.

His successor and son, Bashar Assad lacked the political and military experiences upon inauguration. Therefore, he would rely on the support and consultation of his family members and the old guard of the ancient regime once the leadership transition was complete. As Abu Houssam noted,

Under Hafez Assad, one person was governing Syria, but under his son, Bashar Assad, the entire Assad family was governing Syria.

Abu Sakker who served as a former member in the Ba’ath party echoes the same assessment. He clearly articulated the following account in his story:

Bashar Assad used his family to control all Syria at all levels. Politically, his family members held the most powerful positions. Also, they used individuals from other minorities and the Sunnis as a façade to legitimize their ruling such as Mustafa Tlas who was a Sunni. Few high-ranking military officers, five people, control Syria: Bashar Assad, his brother Maher Assad, his cousin

Rami Makhlouf, his cousin Ali Makhlouf, and his cousin Hafez Makhlouf. Bashar Assad and his family control Syria politically and economically.

In 2010, Syria ranked 127 out of 178 countries on the corruption index with a 2.5 score compared to Denmark that ranked the least corrupt country in the world with a score of 9.3 and Somalia the most corrupt country with a score of 1.1 (Transparency International Report, 2010, 3). There was a consensus amongst all of the participants that corruption and bribery was a common practice in Syria in order to get one's affairs taken care of by corrupt officials. As Hassan Talib stated,

The Assad regime ruled for 40 years. People are used to corruption and bribery. It is very hard to make a 180 degree change in one day. Assad the father enforced bribery as practice in Syria; if you bribe, your affairs will be done as requested in hospitals, police, courts, and to obtain a driver license.

Individuals who sought appointment in government and military, or were in need of governmental permits had to pay hefty bribes or find someone in the government who could use his/her authority to grant the applicant a job offering or a permit. For example, Abu Houssam refers to his own experience with regards to bribery as follows:

To get anything done you had to find "*Wastta*" [a middleman], someone with a higher status in the government, or someone who knows someone with a higher status in the government to bribe him to get involved and get your affairs completed. We had to bribe even if our paperwork met all the requirements; bribing was a common practice. Alawites people held the most powerful positions, you had to go and supplicate to them in order to get your rights granted. Certainly, they asked for money in order to be involved; we had to bribe them in order to get our rights. Even though the papers are complete, they used to deliberately put the files on hold in order to pay them ransom to get your file going. That was the situation in Syria.

Ironically, Majd used the same phrase "*Wastta*" as well to describe the rate of corruption in Syria before 2011:

There was another issue that I suffered a lot from its existence in Syria, which is "*Wastta*". It is when people rely on their social network in order to get hired in government and non-government jobs, get services, and even get

pardoned for committing felonies. There was no equality between Syrians; an individual whose father is a high-ranking official will have the priority over the ordinary individual. There was discrimination [...] Sons of high-ranking officials had a great authority; it could be that the father is a good person, but his sons retain their father's authority and engage in authority abuse against others. Consequently, we as people started to hate the sons of high-ranking officials, their fathers, and those who appointed them. That is how discrimination and preferential treatment started.

Corruption spread throughout all government institutions, including courts and judges who were supposed to maintain the rule of law and fairness. Kamal explicitly supports the Assad regime, and condemned the anti-government protests and its disastrous outcomes. Nonetheless, he agrees that corruption is rejected and condemned by all Syrians:

We are all as Syrians against corruption, and injustice. We did not like corrupted individuals. Indeed, so many government officials were corrupted. For example, the judges who are supposed to maintain the scale of justice, some of them were corrupted and took bribes.

Abuse of power by high-ranking officials damaged Syrian peoples' confidence in the state system, particularly, its justice system that was supposed to protect the rights of the powerless. Abu Houssam shared with me the dealings of a corrupted lawyer in an Alawites majority [governorate B] in the following manner:

What we were lacking in Syria is justice; there was no justice in courts. There was discrimination in Syria, particularly, in my home province Latakia. In Latakia, there was an individual from the Assad family called Faouaz ... He had two law offices and employed lawyers who worked on his behalf. For example, if you have a problem that you could not solve such as evicting a tenant, all you had to do was give him 100,000 Lira, eventually he will evict the tenant even though the law requires the court's decision for such action, but he could evict people under killing threats. However, if the tenant paid the Lawyer Faouaz more, he would stay in the house. Everything was under threat and the use of coercion.

The Assad regime created a kinship political regime, whereas, government and military officials, and their close family and friends used the authority of their office to get privileges and enrich themselves. Abu Riyad noted the following in his narrative:

In society at the individual level, there was no difference between Sunnis and Shia and Alawites. However, at the [level of] government apparatuses, police and military, Shia and Alawites had privileges. For example, a son of a Shia minister, or a Shia military officer had all powers to beat people and even kill them without being questioned or prosecuted. No one would tell him a word. Worst-case scenario, they might arrest him for 4 hours, and then release him because he is Shia. In contrast, when a Sunni harms someone involuntarily, he would be arrested and sentenced for a few years. In the beginning, when the protests started, and before the militarization of the uprising, we were very optimistic; after a year, and two years passed, we were still optimistic to defeat the regime and have a regime change. But after two years, when militias, Russia, and Iran intervened militarily in Syria, I felt that we lost everything; we lost Syria, and the hope to see anyone else.

Likewise, Abu Houssam recognized that there was no real justice in Syria because of the corruption and nepotism:

There was no justice in Syria. Also, there were discriminatory practices in favor of the Alawites. For example, in recent years before the protests, there was economic difficulty in Syria, Alawites people used to gain all the government procurements. If you want to open a business, you had to find an Alawites partner such as an Alawites officer to be your business partner; he is not supposed to work or contribute to the capital. He contributes nothing, but he is supposed to provide protection and use his status to serve the business.

The shared perception of injustice and unfairness led to a collective rejection of the status quo. Abu Hassan stresses that the eruption of the anti-government protests was a rejection of the widespread of corruption, and abuse of power by the state officials:

The elites of the Alawites sect were controlling Syria. Alawites were hired in the important state positions. If you are not Alawites, and you want to get hired in government, you had to bribe the government officials. Syrians did not revolt for economic reasons like Egyptians. We revolted against corruption.

The quotes of participants reflect the manifestations of structural violence that existed in Syria before 2011. The lack of the rule of law and accountability, and inequality led to nepotism, abuse of power, and widespread corruption at all levels.

4.6 - Police State: Political Violence and Culture of Fear-“*Under the Assad regime, we were able to open our mouths only in the dentist’s clinic.*” *Abu Yahia.*

Political regimes that have a national legitimacy deficit tend to create a state of public fear either from the threat of an external enemy, or a domestic threat in order to justify infringements on individuals’ economic and political rights, and the excess empowerment of law enforcement agencies. The Hafez Assad regime depicted Israel as the external enemy and the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood as a domestic threat. Therefore, turned the state of emergency that was enacted in 1963 into a permanent legal status, and employed the intelligent secret police, *Mukhabarat*, to suppress political opposition and scrutinize ordinary peoples’ lives and detain them if required for being a threat to national security (Rabil, 2006, 29). Abu Sakker articulated that,

People were under pressure; we lived under a “state of emergency” for 40 years since Hafez Assad. The *Mukhabarat* [secret security forces] held the country with an iron fist.

The Assad regime created several branches of secret police agencies in order to crackdown on opponents’ critical voices. The state of emergency granted security and intelligence agencies unlimited discretionary powers to detain anyone who presumably represented a threat to national security. Therefore, the arrest/detention of Syrian citizens did not require arrest warrants from the courts. Hence, Abu Yahia argued that if an individual was arrested, it became extremely difficult to track down the agency that arrested him:

Psychologically, Syrians were not relaxed; they did not have the privilege to talk freely. If you criticize the government, dozens of branches of secret police could arrest you. We have the Air Military Secret Intelligence Service, Secret Intelligence Force, Military Intelligence Service, and Military Police Force. If you were arrested, no one would know which branch of secret service arrested you.

The enormous powers that security and intelligence agencies have in Syria created a culture of fear, anxiety, suspicion, distrust, and alienation. Majd, a university student and teacher from [governorate G] shared the following with me:

In order to live secured in Syria, you had to avoid politics. The popular proverb was, “the walls have ears,” because [even] if you are alone, you would feel scared to talk, because we had very powerful Security Intelligence Services. The government had spies in every city and town. No one could discuss politics. If I would discuss politics with you, then I had to talk positively and praise, applaud, and not reveal what I truly have in my heart, or remain silent for the rest of my life to be secure and relaxed. Even if you were in your own room alone, you would be scared and not feel comfortable to talk freely. Therefore, the majority of people were not aware about politics, and they tried to avoid politics to live safely.

Fear from secret police agencies implanted seeds of distrust and suspicion amongst people. At social gatherings, individuals had to pay close attention to what they said, especially, if the topic of conversation was about politics. In fact, Abu Yahia noted that since arrests took place without arrest warrants, it opened the door to arrests based on false accusations:

We did not have the luxury to criticize the government publicly. We could not express our dissatisfaction about the government’s performance; we had to accept the status quo without opposition. We had to pick and choose carefully our friends whom we socialize with. If you are at a social gathering, you must be sure that all attendees are worthy of trust if you are going to discuss political issues, or criticize the government. Otherwise, most definitely someone would inform one of the security branches about what you said. If you say something against the government in a social gathering with people you do not trust; then within half an hour you will be arrested. You are more likely as well to be arrested based on hearsay. For example, if someone does not like you, he could claim that you said something against the government/criticized the government; then, you will be arrested by the

security forces for three to five months, and you may not leave the prison intact in your good physical abilities. As a result, people were silenced and preoccupied with their daily affairs without involving themselves in politics. We used to spend the majority of our times at work and playing cards.

Discretionary power of police and secret police agencies, and a lack of the application of the rule of law, human rights and public liberties deprived ordinary Syrian citizens from their rights to discuss national political issues and be critical of government management of state affairs. Suspicion and distrust was not just among civilians in society, it was also in the military establishment amongst officers. Abu Yahia, a veteran, from [governorate D] states the following opinion:

Syria was under a lot of pressure; even the high-ranking military officers were under surveillance. You could have a very close friend, but he is secretly an agent that works as a spy for the regime. For example, there was a Brigadier-General sitting with his friends watching television; it happened that he had the TV remote control in his hand, and eventually, he changed the channel when the image of the president appeared on the screen. The following day, the Air Forces Secret Intelligence service arrested him. Consequently, he spent nine years of his life in prison. There are so many incidents like this. What happened to that officer was not an odd incident.

The state of fear from the police and secret police agencies resonated foremost with adult Syrians who lived under Hafez Assad. Therefore, in the 2011 protests, Syrian youth proclaimed the leadership of the anti-government protests. Majd, a university student and a teacher from [governorate G] articulated the following in his story:

In the beginning, youth protesters demanded freedom. Youth wanted a larger margin of freedom like other countries. Adult men did not have the courage to speak up and protest; youths led the protests. I personally, was a young man, but I did not have the courage to speak up at that time. But youngsters had the courage. As a result, they were arrested and beat up; moreover, their parents got arrested and beat up ... 90% of the protests were led by youths. Youths wrote on the walls "we want freedom"; consequently, they were arrested and punished severely. The security forces tortured the young protesters. As a result, the people reacted and mobilized to protest against the regime. If you see your son tortured, you will have a reaction. That is how the troubles started, and transferred to other provinces.

Those youth protesters faced excessive force by the pro-Assad security forces in the early days of the protests, including torture. Abu Sakker noted that this treatment of youth protesters is believed to have triggered nationwide protests:

Protests started in March 15, 2011 in the southern province of Daraa calling for reform. Amongst protesters, there were youth activists aged 15 who wrote on the walls of buildings, “Want the regime to step down,” “Yasqot Nezzam”. Amongst youth activists who were arrested for writing that phrase, was Hamza Alkhatib, aged 13 at the time; he was tortured, and mutilated. They pulled his fingernails and cut his genitals. Tribes from the governorate of Daraa, therefore, the leaders of the tribes went to visit the head of the Secret Intelligence Service in the province, Atef Najib, who is Bashar Assad’s cousin, to request the release of the arrested children. But he denied their request, and humiliated them by using very disrespectful words towards them. As you know, Arab tribes have so much pride. They felt violated in their dignity. Some of the tribes’ leaders escaped to Jordan and condemned the regime’s brutal actions, and from there, the armed struggle against the Assad regime started.

All participants assert that Syrians lived under a police state that denied them their basic political rights and liberties. Syrians lacked freedom of expression and lived under the mercy of the discretionary power of secret police agencies. The critical voices of ordinary Syrians, and political elites towards the regime were met with aggressive security measures that threatened their physical safety. That sense of fear diminished as Syrian youth saw their counterparts in Tunisia and Egypt successfully ousting the Ben Ali and Mubarak’s regimes from power.

4.7 - Arab Spring Uprising: A Desperate Call for Reform- *“I think Syrian people wanted to imitate what happened in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya.” Abu Hassan.*

In an interview with the New York Times in January 2011, Bashar Assad stated that Syria was immune from the Arab Spring and that his regime had public support and

legitimacy. Yet, within weeks of that interview, the wave of political change that was engulfing the MENA region reached Syria in March 2011.

The inauguration of Bashar Assad gave Syrians hope that his governing style would reflect his life experiences. Bashar was, at the time, a young medical doctor by profession, and spent a significant time of his life living in London, England. Therefore, there was a shared assumption, particularly amongst Syrian youth, that he would eliminate the state of emergency, expand the margins of political freedom and liberties, and lead political and economic reform. Indeed, Bashar initially acted as a liberal keen to appear in public spaces casually holding his wife, walking along streets, and driving their car. But in reality, he maintained the same governing style of his father. He used the state's resources and legal powers to enrich himself, and his inner circles of family members and loyalists. For example, Abu Houssam stated the following in his story:

When Bashar became the president of Syria, people had a hope that he will start reform, because he is an educated medical doctor, and has the ability to comprehend the situation. Contrary to his father who was a military officer, Bashar completed his education in Britain. Therefore, people expected that he would widen the margin of freedom in Syria. The hopes were so big. But the outcomes of his ruling were disastrous. Under Assad the father, one person was governing, but under Bashar, the entire Assad family was governing Syria. For example, Bashar's cousin, Rami Makhoul, was controlling Syria's economic wealth. In Syria, we had oil and gas, but the revenues were not for the Syrian people. The revenues of oil were not included in Syria's national annual budget. The family seized all revenues.

Participants provided various explanations for the outbreak of anti-government protests. For example, Hana highlighted the deterioration of socioeconomic conditions as a primary cause of the outbreak of the protests. She described the socioeconomic conditions in her immediate social circle in her community in the following way:

Everything that happens has a cause; poverty and rejection of the living conditions drove people to revolt collectively in protests. There were people

who believed that if they protest, the government would reform and make things better, but our president chose not to do anything. He promised his people a lot, but he did nothing. He promised to increase wages, give allowances to people, and do this and that, but he did nothing. When he did nothing, people revolted in rejection of high prices.

In contrast, Abu Houssam emphasizes the influence of political change in Tunisia and Egypt on the eruption of the anti-government protests in Syria:

Syrians were influenced by the outcomes of the Tunisian uprising. The collapse of regime in Egypt gave hope to Syrians that it is possible to achieve a similar success in Syria. The Assad family governed Syria for more than 40 years. Bashar inherited from his father and became a president without election. So, people were displeased and under pressure. There was lot of injustice and people were demanding reform.

All participants affirmed that activists in the early days of protests did not demand regime change. Instead, as Khaled stated, they demanded freedom, and sociopolitical and economic reform:

In the beginning of the protests people demanded freedom and reform. For example, in Syria, university graduates were unemployed. They did not get hired after the completion of their degrees. And when they got hired, they did not have the potential to get jobs in their field of study. You will find a person who has the credentials of an engineer, but he works as a carpenter. That is the reform they asked for, and freedom of expression. They did not ask for anything else.

Similarly, Majd articulated that the young people demanded that the regime meet their requests to recognize their basic human needs:

People demanded reformation at several levels, reform in the education system, economic reform, reform in the health care system. The call for reforms was an old demand. People re-demanded them. The government attempted to meet the demands, but whatever it would have done, it would not have been able to show quick results of its reform policies. The government did not have the adequate timeframe to improve the sectors that it had ignored for many years. That's how the troubles increased, and protests transferred from one province to another. The protests spread in all provinces, and the government arrested more and more protesters. That's what transformed the peaceful protests into an armed struggle against the government.

Nevertheless, Kamal argued that the anti-Assad regime protesters did not give the regime an adequate timeframe to implement the reforms demanded.

In the beginning of the uprising, protesters demanded freedom, but later on they demanded regime change. Frankly, the regime responded to the protesters' demands and started reform, but the time frame that was given to the regime was not enough to implement a full reform. If the system is 100% corrupted, you cannot reform it 100% in a short time. The regime recognized the necessity of reform. For example, the president fired numerous governorates' governors who were corrupted such as the governor of Homs who was indeed a corrupted official. There was a foreign agenda that aimed to destroy Syria. But they used some Syrians as a means to achieve their interests in Syria. They lived under the Assad regime for 40 years; they could have waited patiently a little bit more.

Most participants argued that the Assad regime's use of excessive force against activists and the absence of substantial steps to implement reform contributed to the escalation of the conflict into a violent armed struggle. For Example, Abu Sakker asserts that if Bashar Assad held his brother in law, Atef Najib, responsible for the grave human rights atrocities that he committed in Daraa governorate during the early days of the protests against youth protesters, he would have contained the protests, and avoided nationwide protests in solidarity with the people of Daraa:

The regime used excessive force against peaceful protesters who were chanting peacefully demanding reform. The pro-regime forces killed so many activists in the first 6 months. Moreover, the regime planted security intelligence officers amongst protesters in order to shift the peaceful protests towards violence, in other words, the regime wanted to militarize the protests in order to justify the use of force against activists.

Abu Houssam highlighted the peaceful nature of anti-government protests in the early days of the uprising and blames the regime for the escalation of protests into violence.

This is what he had to say on the issue:

In Hama activists organized a peaceful demonstration of 1 million protesters; there was a singer who was chanting and leading the masses. On the following day, they found him slaughtered and his body thrown into the Assey River. As a result, people lost hope and shifted towards an armed struggle. People realized that peaceful protests would not make the desired change. Also, Assad did not give positive indications that he would accept the peoples' demands. He did not give concessions to the people. In contrast, he tried to discredit the protests, and claimed that what is happening is a foreign conspiracy. Consequently, protesters realized that there was no hope for reform and change. In my opinion, the use of excessive violence against protesters shifted protesters towards using violence.

The escalation of the Arab spring protests in Libya, Syria, and Yemen into brutal protracted violent conflicts fostered sentiments of regret and disappointment amongst ordinary citizens. Protesters strove for socioeconomic justice, freedom, and equality. However, the physical destruction of those countries and the humanitarian crisis that resulted from the armed struggle made people regret their participation in the protests. In fact, given the current outcomes of the protests in Syria, some participants asserted they would prefer to live in the past status quo (negative peace) that existed before the 2011 uprising. For example, Hassan Talib noted the following in his story:

The eruption of the protests did not achieve any goals. It ruined Syria and destroyed it. But, what happened has happened. In general, if you ask Syrians, do you want Syria of today, or Syria before 2011? Certainly, people will choose Syria before 2011. At least we were surviving. The 2011 status quo was working for us. We were alive. 90% of Syrians would not have protested against the regime if they had predicted the outcomes of the protests to be similar to today's circumstances, because the Syrian people were surviving. Syria was a rich country; it has a lot of resources. It had agriculture, industry, and everything you need. We were lacking nothing. The problem was widespread corruption and bribery that were in peoples' blood. If I graduate from the medical school and I have great grades, I must bribe someone in order to be hired as a doctor.

Hana shares similar sentiments, as she stated in the following manner:

Syrians were living in peace, but suddenly the protests erupted and developed into troubles. We are against what has happened in Syria. We are not satisfied about the outcomes [...] People demanded freedom. But, personally, I am

against what the pursuit of that freedom has caused. I want Syria to remain in peace and stability. Most importantly, Syria needs security and safety. Before the 2011 protests, we felt safe in our community; we used to go out without fear. But since the protests and troubles started, we lost the sense of security and safety that we had before. Before the 2011 protests, women had a sense of safety; a woman could return to her home at 1:00 a.m. from family gatherings without fear. There was a sense of safety; there were not any troubles. But since the protests started, kidnapping, burglary, and murder increased. If you are driving your car, they would stop you and take your car, or kidnap you and take your car. Many things appeared in Syria that scared people. People lost the sense of safety and security. People lost the feeling of safety to leave their houses. In fact, people started to leave their homes holding their hearts from fear that they would be harmed. A lot of people left their homes, and did not return. They disappeared. Terrorist groups then appeared in Syria.

Further, Kamal condemned the anti-Assad protests and wished that they did not erupt at all:

Before 2011, I do recognize that there was injustice and oppression in Syria, but we were living in peace. It is true that Sunnis are the majority, and deserve to be in power. Nonetheless, I am against the anti-regime protest. In my view, the protests promoted sectarianism and intergroup tensions. Sectarianism was hidden in Syria, but the uprising allowed it to emerge onto the surface.

Khaled echoes the same sentiments. He recognized that the protests might have been a mistake as it resulted in a vicious sectarian war:

All what happened from the beginning was a mistake. People protested against the regime to demand freedom and reform. But, the military killed protesters to suppress the revolution. If our regime, or what was our regime, held those who killed innocent people accountable, implemented the reform demands, and listened to people's voice, we would not have reached the point where we are at right now. Syria's infrastructure and buildings are destroyed; there are no buildings that are still standing intact in Syria. What can I tell you; I do not know what to say, whatever happened in Syria was a mistake from the beginning, and until now is a mistake.

It is worth noting that Kamal dismissed the argument that anti-government protests were a rejection to lack of freedom and democracy, implying that Syria's regional and international enemies conspired to dismantle the Assad regime, and destabilize the

country. He argued that the lack of freedom and democracy is not solely exclusive to Syria. In fact, it is common amongst all Arab autocratic regimes in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). He went onto say that,

All Arab republics and kingdom lacked freedom. For example, was there freedom in Jordan, or Saudi Arabia? If you talk about the king you will disappear. The only exception was Lebanon because the political system that was created after the Taef Agreement created a margin of freedom. That situation was not just in Syria; in fact, it was in all of the Arab countries. There was not a real democracy and freedom ... Politically, we did not have freedom like all Arab countries in the region. We did not have freedom of expression and freedom of the press; no one could criticize the government as a whole, or ministers as individuals ... I believe that foreign powers promoted sectarianism in Syria, particularly, the united States and Israel, and their Arab regime allies: Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Jordan, and Qatar. They were aware that the intergroup peace before 2011 was fragile; they knew Syria's weak points. They knew the soft points in the Syrian society, namely religious and ethnic diversity. Alawites were in power and excluded the Sunni majority. But in my opinion, the protests promoted sectarianism.

The Arab Spring uprising started as an authentic desperate call for socioeconomic and political reform. Yet, the authoritarian Arab regimes employed excessive force against protesters, which therefore, transformed the protesters' demands from a call for reform to calls for regime change. The latter demand intensified the conflict in Syria and transformed it into a large-scale civil war.

4.8 - International Politics: Syria as a Battleground of a Proxy War—*“The conflict counterparts are not Assad and the opposition. The real conflict counterparts are the United States and Russia, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, Qatar and United Arab Emirates” Kamal.*

During the Cold War era, both the United States and the Soviet Union fought fiercely to maintain their spheres of influence worldwide creating many proxy wars. Thus, both superpowers faced each other indirectly in different parts of the world through military coups and counter military coups supporting insurgency and pro-insurgency

movements. Conflict counterparts rely heavily on external sponsors' financial aid, arms supplies, and political support in order to defeat adversaries, or at least sustain a stronghold in the conflict. Destructive external intervention in intrastate conflict has contributed significantly to conflict prolongation in various zones of conflict in the world (Pearson, & Olsen Lounsbery, 2011, 43; Kriesberg, 2011, 161) and Syria is no exception. The study participants attributed the escalation and protraction of Syria's civil war to external intervention in the conflict. For example, Kamal stated that Syria is being used as a battlefield for a proxy war between Russia and the US, and other regional powers:

If you analyze the conflict, you will find that the conflict counterparts are not Assad and the opposition. The real conflict counterparts are the United States and Russia, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Emirates. Assad and the opposition are tools. What we have in Syria is a proxy war with Syrian hands on Syrian territories ... there are two major superpowers that play a role in Syria, Russia and the United States. Both countries have their differences and they are using Syria as a battle zone to flex their muscles. What is going on in Syria is a proxy war. Both powers are in rivalry over the Middle East region. And Arab countries are also in rivalry to solve their disagreements about Syria.

Khaled attributed the deterioration of Syria's conflict specifically to Russia's military intervention, and extensive support from Iran and its Shia sponsored militia groups to the Assad regime. He contended that foreign powers are actively engaged on the ground with rival groups:

What made things worse in Syria is the intervention of foreign powers in the conflict. The foreign powers that intervened to support the Assad regime like Hezbollah, Iraqi Shia Militias, and Russia. Until this moment in Syria, you will not find barracks controlled by the Syrian military; you will find barracks controlled by the Russian military. All Syrian cities are surrounded by the Russian military. Russians are making life hard for people more and more. They are supporting the Assad regime militarily; they conduct air strikes, and invade Syrian territories. Russia's air forces support the pro-Assad forces to invade and commit atrocities against people. This is definitely wrong. The world made the biggest mistake in that it allowed Russian intervention in Syria.

Syria's conflicting counterpart's manipulated sectarian identity and transformed the conflict into a sectarian civil war. The Assad regime exploited Shia solidarities and called upon Iran and its Shia militias in Lebanon, Iraq and elsewhere for support against Sunni-led rebels who are supported by regional Sunni powers. Abu Sakker noted that the Assad regime framed the conflict in a direction that necessitated the intervention of his external guarantors:

The regime manipulated the anti-government protests. It represented the protests and revolution as a war against Alawites and Shia people. Therefore, Assad requested the support of the Shia regime in Iran. As a result, the conflict in Syria shifted to a sectarian war.

Likewise, Abu Yahia reported that rival regional powers were sending militias into Syria to fight with different factions:

Iran has brought to Syria Shia militias from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Azerbaijan. Iran recruits poor Shia individuals from everywhere, and brings them to Syria to fight with them. Hezbollah and Iran with all its militias must withdraw from Syria if we would have peace in Syria.

In contrast, Abu Hassan stated that anti-Assad rebel groups relied on Western powers and Sunni regional powers:

In my opinion, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia seduced us, trapped us, and destroyed the country. Saudi Arabia supported the anti-regime militias, and the president of Turkey, Erdogan, promised to support Syrians. He said in one of his speeches, "we will not allow what happened in Hama to re-occur." [...]. Erdogan's statement motivated people to revolt and stand against the Assad regime. People thought that Saudi Arabia and Turkey would support them. However, in recent years, Saudi Arabia changed its position and supported the Assad regime because it was worried that the success of the revolution would bring the waves of change to the Arab Gulf countries.

Moreover, geopolitics also plays an important role in the dynamic of the Syrian civil war. The Kurds of Syria have a national aspiration to form their own country. They have received enormous support from the US, Israel, and other Western powers since they

have been at the forefront of the global war against terrorist organizations, especially, ISIS. In contrast, Turkey categorizes the Kurdish militant groups as terrorist organizations that threaten its national territorial integrity. Therefore, it intervened in Northern Syria against Kurdish groups to prevent them from controlling Turkish-Syrian borders and surrounding territories. Hassan Talib reflects on that paradox in the following manner:

In the [name of governorate] there is a region called [name]. It is between a region called Ezaz from the South, and the Turkish borders from the North. In the early years of the uprising, the Kurds were neutral. They did not revolt against the regime. Therefore, the Assad air force used to bombard people of Ezaz and did not target the Kurds in Efrine. As a result, the people of Ezaz moved away to seek refuge in Efrine. When the Kurds of Syria saw the rise of the Kurds of Iraq, they became ambitious and wanted to claim their own territories and create an independent state for the Kurds. Afterwards, they received external support from foreign powers and started to throw out Arab Sunnis from the Efrine region in an attempt to have a clear region for Kurds only. Therefore, if you stay in territories under their control, you will need to change the car plates, and if you cross their territories, you will need to pay tariffs. Currently, Kurds control regions of Aleppo with the support of external powers.

Turkey is one of the main supporters of the FSA. It provides weapons, training, and logistical support to the FSA leadership. In the latest political development, the Turkish military and the FSA conducted joint military operations in Northern Syria to liberate it from Kurdish militant groups (New York Times, 2018). While, some Syrians perceive such operations as necessary and support them, others, especially Syrian Kurds, condemn the Turkish military intervention and consider it as an act of aggression that violates Syria's sovereignty. Oum Hanin reflected on this issue in the following way:

Now there is a ceasefire in many parts of Syria. In Idlib there are many buffer zones. Also, Turkish forces entered into Idlib. There are people who are in favor of the Turkish forces' presence, and there are those who oppose it and consider it occupation. Those who welcome the Turkish presence in Idlib

appreciate that there is a ceasefire in the region, and that they feel safe and live in peace.

In 2011, Russia opposed the international military operation against the Qaddafi regime in Libya. Russia used the disastrous outcomes in Libya after Qaddafi's regime collapsed, and counterterrorism to justify its intervention in Syria in 2015 (Allison, 2013, 795-797). Such sentiments were echoed by Kamal who believed that that Russian military intervention has saved Syria from becoming a failed state implying that the Russian military intervention prevented the deterioration of the situation in Syria:

In my opinion, Russia plays a positive role in Syria. Sure, it interfered in Syria to protect its interests. However, if Russia did not intervene militarily in Syria, Assad would have been removed and Syria would have become a failed state like Libya. Russia supported Assad to maintain stability and avoid chaos.

Indeed, the Russian military intervention saved the Assad regime from collapse and defeat by the rebels; however, it contributed to prolonging of the conflict. Abu Houssam noted that the Russian intervention in the conflict blunted the military capabilities of the Free Syrian Army and other opposition militant groups:

I am still in contact with my brother-in-law who is currently living in a Turkish border city with Syria called "Hattay". Syrians there are close to Syria, and they know more about the recent developments. He told me that since Russia intervened militarily in Latakia, revolutionary groups were defeated and lost their territories.

In contrast, Iran and Hezbollah justify their military intervention in Syria on sectarian grounds. Iran acts as a protector of the Shia sect around the world. Therefore, its leadership believes that it had to intervene to protect Shia religious sites in Syria. Consequently, it mobilized Shia militias and fighters from different parts of the world, such as Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Hassan Talib recognized the influence of Iran and its surrogates in the internal civil war:

Syria must be for Syrians. Right now, Hezbollah controls the Syrian territories with Lebanon borders. Historical religious sites in Aleppo, particularly, the area of Sit Zeinab is controlled by Shia of Iran. Shia from Iran are spreading in Aleppo. In the Aleppo province we have two small Shia towns called Nobol and Zahraa, the populations of both towns do not exceed 25,000. However, during the war they were under siege from the revolutionary groups, but they receive food and their needs by the Assad air forces because they are Shia.

Overall, all participants believed that direct and indirect military intervention of regional and international external powers in Syria have significantly contributed to the deterioration of the Syrian conflict and its prolongation. Abu Hassan stated that, “external powers such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar play a destructive role in Syria. We as Syrians altogether are able to reach a resolution.”

The manipulation of sectarian identity and the ongoing sectarian rivalry between Saudi Arabia, and Iran as well as the geopolitical rivalry between Russia and the Western powers, namely the US are driving the conflict. In addition, the geopolitical concerns of Turkey with regards to the Kurds’ attempts to control Syria’s northern territories turned the warring parties into agents for external guarantors. Thus, the political will and economic support of all those external powers is needed to end the conflict and reach a peace deal.

4.9 - Key Findings of the Research

Numerous significant findings emerged inductively from the seven themes outlined in chapter four. According to the experiences, perceptions, and narratives of the twelve interviewees, since the inauguration of Bashar Assad as President in 2000, Syria was a stable country marked largely by peaceful intergroup co-existence. It had promising economic growth rates according to forecasts from the World Bank and the

IMF. Most participants asserted that they had decent life styles living in Syria before 2011. As Kamal, Abu Houssam, and Abu Hassan noted the economy was good, and household incomes increased significantly. However, all participants reported that they lived under an oppressive regime. They lacked freedom of speech, and were vulnerable to arbitrary arrest by the police and security intelligence agencies (the *Mukhabarat*) for discussing political matters in public, or expressing resentment towards the regime, or for being falsely accused of criticizing the regime and its policies. As Abu Yahia noted, Syrians were able to open their mouths only in the dentist's clinic out of fear of physical violence and their personal security. That political oppression created a collective resentment against the Assad regime, and was the basis for the uprising. As Fisher (1997) noted the denial of people's basic human needs along with the lack of human rights creates the basis for the escalation of ethno-political conflicts. Ruling a society with an "iron fist" as Abu Sakker noted created an artificial stability in Syria; people accepted the status quo not by choice, but by coercion (see also, Atassi, 2011).

Further, all participants stressed that they were aware of intergroup differences in the society. Nonetheless, they reported peaceful co-existence, mutual respect, amity, solidarity, and cooperation before 2011. Moreover, they recognized that the Assad Alawites regime created a sectarian system by giving priority to Alawites people especially in hiring and promotion in government, the military and security positions. The regime treated other groups' members as second-class citizens (structural violence/systemic discrimination). As Abu Sakker, Kamal, Abu Hassan, Hassan Talib, and Kamal noted, sectarianism was evident particularly in the military and security intelligence agencies, yet in the overall society people lived together in harmony. These

manifestations of physical violence, structural violence, and systemic injustice/discrimination indicate that Syria was an example of a society that lived in a state of “negative peace”. Therefore, peacebuilding efforts in a future postaccord Syria should include the legal and institutional mechanisms of distributive justice, and legal procedural justice, known as reparative justice in order to build a durable peace (see Deutsch, 2014, 33-40).

As illustrated in chapter one, the historical context, Syria’s socioeconomic and political conditions were similar to the rest of the Arab authoritarian regimes, except for the Arab Gulf rent-based petroleum states. Assad’s regime has a long history of suppressing the opposition (for e.g., the Hama Massacre in 1982). However, as the Tunisian youth protesters peacefully succeeded in overthrowing Ben Ali’s ruthless regime on January 14, 2011 that was swiftly followed by the collapse of Mubarak’s regime in Egypt on April 13, 2011, Syrians also assembled peacefully in cities’ squares and streets to voice their dissatisfactions with the Assad regime and call for reforms. Syrian protesters did not demand regime change in the first week of the uprising. Instead, they demanded reform within the continuity of the regime, chanting, “People want freedom.” However, the excessive use of force by the security forces shifted their demands to instead look for regime change. As a result, what started as peaceful protests, transformed into an armed struggle. Numerous military personnel defected from the Syrian army and formed militant rebel groups.

Therefore, the conflict counterparts’ adopted conflicting styles that determined the dynamics and trajectories of the conflict. Ben Ali and Mubarak’s conflict withdrawal style led to relatively minimal damage in both countries compared to what happened in

Syria, Libya, and now in Yemen. However, Assad's competitive conflict style and his regime's rejection of constructively accommodating and responding positively to the protesters' demands contributed to the conflict's escalation. Therefore, international conflict interventions should adopt targeted coercive diplomatic and economic measures against warring parties that adopt aggressive behavior and refuse to use peaceful channels to solve conflict (Donnelly, 2013, 201-203). For example, in 2012, the Arab League imposed diplomatic sanctions against the Assad regime for its failure to halt violence and pursue the organization's peace plan. The sanctions included suspending Syria's membership in the organization (Donnelly, 2013, 178). However, the Arab League's efforts failed to sway Assad from using excessive force against the protestors because he had the economic, political and military support of Iran, and Russia.

All participants asserted that the ethnoreligious components of one's identity did not affect the nature/quality of intergroup interpersonal relationships before the 2011 protests and subsequent war. Ordinary Syrians lived in harmony, solidarity, and cooperation at the grassroots level. Nonetheless, they were aware that their sectarian identities determined their future prospects because of systemic privileges or disenfranchisement. Hiring in the military, secret intelligence police branches, and senior government positions was not based on meritocracy; rather it was based on sectarian identity. The Alawites sect elites occupied the senior most powerful positions in the state apparatuses, especially the military and secret police branches. The Assad regime pursued this policy in order to safeguard its total control of the country and prevent a counter military coup. However, using sectarian identity implicitly as a requirement in the hiring process in the military, police, civil service, and government positions (hidden

systemic discrimination) undermined those sectors' development potentials and created the basis for collective grievances, especially, amongst young university graduates.

In addition, the recruitment and promotion of the Alawites in the military, secret intelligence agencies, and police ascribed to them the label of a self-interested "sectarian force," rather than a "national force." The Alawites over-representation in the military, secret intelligence forces, and the police, and their control of those institutions determined the dynamics and outcomes of the Syrian conflict to a large extent. Alawites elites in the military and law enforcement realized from the beginning of the conflict that their fate was interconnected with Bashar Assad's fate. Thus, they fought fiercely to suppress the uprising and prevail against the rebels. In contrast, the leaderships of the Tunisian and Egyptian national armies were not interconnected with the head of states through a sectarian identity bond. Consequently, they did not share the perception that their fate was tied to that of the head of state. Military personnel in both of those countries refused to descend to the streets to suppress the protesters. In contrast, they endorsed the protesters' demands for sociopolitical and economic reform, which thereby, forced President Ben Ali in Tunisia and President Hosni Mubarak in Egypt to step down. As such, it is imperative to reform the Syrian army and law enforcement institution in order to build a national army that represents all of Syria's religious groups and socioeconomic classes and stands with the peoples' will, and not with the regime.

The fact that the Assad regime's leadership hails from a minority group explains its fear of the Sunni majority population. The regimes assumed that if the Sunnis controlled the military and security forces, they would have plotted a military coup against the regime. Also, if the regime organized open and free presidential elections, a

Sunni candidate could win the race. Thus, a future post-peace accord Syria needs to adopt power-sharing mechanisms of constitutional democracies, an inclusive constitution, and an independent judiciary system that safeguard the rights of all minorities.

Conflict protagonists in divided societies tend to demonize opponents and discredit their cause to mobilize ingroup members and secure their support. Both the Assad regime and rebels manipulated sectarian identity in order to mobilize ingroup members, and secure the political and military support of external powers with whom they share the same identity and/or interests. Assad requested the support of Iran and its sponsored militias; particularly, Hezbollah to suppress Sunni-led rebel groups. Likewise, rebel groups relied on the support of Sunni Arab countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey. The manipulation of the group's sectarian identity transformed the conflict in Syria from a popular social movement that demanded socioeconomic and political reform into a sectarian civil war that contributed to its prolongation. Sectarian external sponsors play a destructive role in the ongoing conflict in Syria. Therefore, a potential peace in Syria is determined, to a large extent, by the transformation of the external sponsors' destructive role in the conflict into a constructive role by ending the military support to their sponsored warring parties, pressuring them to halt violence and to resume sincere peace talks, as well as supporting the peacebuilding efforts politically and economically.

In addition, the lack of swift and adequate conflict intervention effort contributes to the proliferation of conflict parties, the complexity and fluidity of the issues, and conflict prolongation. In 2011, the conflict parties were mainly the youth activists (who mobilized Syrians through social media, and led them during the street protests), and the

Assad regime (pro-government security forces). However, as the conflict escalated into an armed struggle, the number of conflict parties increased with the emergence of various militant groups (non-armed activists, armed rebels, moderate Islamist groups, Assad forces, pro-Assad domestic militias, Kurdish militias, ISIS, Hezbollah, Iran sponsored Iraqi militias, Al-Qaida affiliate Jabhat Al-Nusra and other radical/terrorist groups, Israel, Russia, Turkey, Israel, and US) (see BBC, 2013). Also, the conflict issues transformed from calls for reform within regime continuity to regime change. In addition, as the Assad regime lost control over vast regions to the opposition and ISIS, the international powers intervened militarily in Syria under international counterterrorism efforts, as well as supporting their conflicting warring parties. Therefore, the proliferation of militant violent groups and ISIS's accelerated terrorist threats shifted the international community's focus and efforts to counterterrorism instead of resolving the conflict and addressing the deep rooted causes that led to the spread of terrorist groups throughout the country.

ISIS emerged as a power in Syria in 2014. However, the conflict started in 2011. If the international community managed and resolved the conflict in the first year of its eruption, ISIS would not have emerged in Syria in the first place, Russia would not have intervened in 2015, and certainly, millions of Syrians would not have left their homeland to neighboring countries as refugees. Many crossed to Europe creating serious sociopolitical repercussions in various Western societies with the rise of nationalist jingoism and populism, and identity politics in many EU member states. It might even be short sighted to claim that the Syrian refugee crises in Europe caused/correlates with the Brexit vote, and succession of numerous ultra right politicians and parties in elections in

various Western democracies. Thus, delayed conflict interventions by the international community in zones of violent conflict, especially civil wars provide the opportunity for the spread of intergroup propaganda that normalizes and justifies violence and thereby leads to gruesome human rights violations such as ethnic cleansing and genocide (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2011, 85-99). The occurrence of those humanitarian crimes creates significant obstacles to peacebuilding and reconciliation processes.

4.10 - Conclusion

This chapter has presented Syrian life economically, socially, and politically before the eruption of the 2011 anti-Assad regime protests through to 2018. In general, all the study participants affirmed that the living economic conditions in Syria before the 2011 uprising were relatively good, and intergroup relationships were peaceful and collaborative. Nonetheless, they asserted that inequality, and discrimination based on sectarian identity, corruption, oppression, and the abuse of power were widespread throughout the society. The escalation of the protests into an armed struggle damaged the peaceful co-habitation of ethnoreligious groups, implanted intergroup mistrust and suspicion, and fostered sectarianism, which transformed the conflict into a sectarian civil war. Further, the military intervention of regional and international rivals led to protracted conflict, and the stagnation of the United Nations backed peace talks that caused a humanitarian crisis with global repercussions.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE SYRIAN DIASPORA'S PERCEPTIONS AND AGENCY IN PEACEBUILDING PROCESSES TO BUILD SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN SYRIA

5.1 - Introduction

In the previous chapter, the participants highlighted the primary hidden causes that instigated and escalated Syria's social uprising into a protracted sectarian civil war. This chapter builds on the previous one and explores their perceptions and possible agency in peacebuilding processes in a post-peace accord Syria, as well as their perceptions of the roles of external powers' in Syrian conflict trajectories.

Typically, conflict protagonists and third parties tend to define peace terms in zones of conflict, while ordinary citizens (refugees and internally displaced persons) have to live under those terms. It should be recalled that this type of approach has built a fragile peace in numerous post-peace accord societies (Mac Ginty 2006; Richmond, 2013). Proceeding from a desire to build a just and sustainable peace, I posed specific research questions to my interviewees with the hope of inviting them to define peacebuilding while positioning themselves in its processes. I also asked them to identify the potential peace terms that might build sustainable peace in Syria in the post-peace accord period, all the while assessing the role of external powers in the conflict. Thus, four themes emerged inductively from the data: 1) The Syrian diaspora's perceptions of peacebuilding, 2) The Syrian diaspora's agency in peacebuilding, 3) The Syrian diaspora's roadmap for sustainable peace in Syria, and 4) The Syrian diaspora's perception of external powers' roles in Syria's conflict trajectories.

5.2 - Syrian Diaspora's Perception of Peacebuilding- *“Peacebuilding must start and happen soon with God's will. Peacebuilding needs to be everywhere and every time in every household, community, and country.”* Oum Hanin.

Participants provided different definitions of peacebuilding. Nonetheless, all of them revolved primarily around ending conflict, restoring peace, repairing peaceful intergroup co-existence, mutual respect, and equality. For example, Kamal articulated that peacebuilding was all communities living together respectfully:

Peacebuilding means living altogether with trust and without suspicion. It means mutual respect, respecting the law, respecting the rights of minorities, securing peoples' necessities such as health care, housing, education and employment, securing equal opportunity, supporting the education system, and educating people to know their rights and obligations.

Likewise, Abu Houssam defined peacebuilding as ending direct violence (negative peace) and building better relationships:

Peacebuilding means the end of war and all acts of violence. That's the most important part. It also means understanding others and being lenient with them. That should be reciprocal by both sides of the conflict. It means removing animosity and antagonism from peoples' hearts.

The magnitude of the ongoing conflict in Syria has disrupted the lives of millions of Syrian civilians and forced them to leave their communities. Ultimately, many participants felt that the end of conflict and peace restoration meant the reunification of families that are dislocated in different parts of the world. Therefore, their perception of peacebuilding reflects their needs. For instance, Khaled stated that people could return to Syria if the war ends:

Personally, peacebuilding means a lot to me. On one hand, it means that I can return to my country, I can return with my family. On the other hand, it means all Syrians can return to Syria. My family members are dispersed everywhere, I have sisters in Turkey, and brothers still in Syria, and I am here [in Canada] with my parents. When you reunite with your family, it feels like

you own the world. If the war does not end, it will be impossible to reunite with my siblings. Therefore, peace is the most important thing.

Abu Sakker also echoes the same sentiments. He noted that the inclusion of all citizens in a fair and just society would build real peace in Syria:

Peacebuilding means a lot. It means that we co-exist peacefully with love, it means the return of all Syria's groups under the protection of the law, and equal opportunity for everyone.

Scheffer (2003) and Lyons (2006) argue that diasporas generated by conflicts rather than by voluntary migration tend to maintain a continuing trauma of displacement as refugees closely pursue conflict updates in their homeland, and permanently carry the hope of return to the homeland territory. Indeed, all of the study participants expressed a strong affinity and attachment towards Syria using phrases such as “motherland” and “the most beautiful country” to describe it. For example, Abu Houssam expressed his hopes for peace, and outlined his plans to return to their communities once the conflict ends, and peace and safety are reinstated:

Syria means the mother or the father. Despite the challenges we had in Syria, we always miss it. I lived outside Syria a lot, I lived in Russia for 6 years, and Turkey, but I always miss Syria. Everyone misses his country of birth. I love Syria. I live in Canada now, it is beautiful and organized, but I do still miss Syria.

Likewise, Kamal talked about Syria with so much pride. He opposes the permanent settlement of Syrians in Western hosting countries and urges all Syrian refugees to return to Syria once the conflict ends:

Syria represents everything to me. I love Syria as a homeland; I was born and raised in Syria. Syria as a country has a good climate with a great history. I feel proud that I am Syrian. We pray for the end of the war, so we can go back to raise our children in their home communities. We were forced to leave Syria to seek safety and a better future for our children.

At all stages of interviews, participants shared narratives of loss and hardships throughout their journeys of displacement within Syria, and outside of Syria travelling to neighboring countries, and then to eventual resettlement in Canada. They expressed sadness and disappointment due to the disastrous outcomes of the regime crackdown on protests and the ongoing civil war. Abu Sakker, a retired engineer in his 70s, denounced what happened in Syria, and blames the Assad regime and his external supporters for the destruction of Syria:

I feel so sad. I am so sad for what happened in Syria. The regime and its foreign supporters killed Syrian people and demolished the country. The regime used all types of banned weapons against its own people; the regime used foreign militias from Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

Likewise, Majd noted that innocent civilians perished en masse during the war:

Frankly, I have sad feelings because of what happened. Innocent people were killed, and missiles fell on the heads of civilians every moment. People feel powerless and they have nothing to do to make a change. Certainly, I am saddened.

Furthermore, some participants expressed feelings of remorse and regret with regards to the Arab Spring uprising and its outcomes. Kamal was stunned that the relative tranquility that existed disappeared in the wake of the government crack down on peaceful protests:

I am so disappointed about the outcomes of the protests. I am disappointed about what has happened in Syria. We were living in peace and stability. I have never imagined that Syria will be as it is today in total destruction, and its people dispersed all over the world.

Additionally, Hana remembered that the war has destroyed families, the infrastructure, and a lot of very young people (the life blood of the community):

We wish the uprising did not erupt at all; we were living in our homes satisfied and happy. All what we wanted is to build a good future for our children. Right now, we wish the protests had not happened in Syria. What

did we benefit from the protests and their outcomes? Nothing, except that our mosques, houses, and schools are destroyed. A lot of children lost their parents. The uprising that erupted in Syria led to undesired consequences; we lost Syria, we lost lives of youths, and women, and people became handicapped.

Therefore, the participants' fond emotions towards Syria as a homeland, and their feelings of wretchedness due to the disastrous outcomes of the protests and civil war have made them strive and pray for the end of conflict. Hana expresses her frustration about the prolongation of the civil war in the following way:

Enough is enough; they need to end the war. We are suffering mentally because of this war. We are unable to endure the pain of this war that has extended for 7 years. Seven years is enough; Syria has gone through enough destruction. Syria has lost a lot of its people. So many people were killed during this war.

Similarly, Oum Hamam recognized the war weariness among the people who wish for peace and tranquility to return to Syria:

People are desperate for peace. People want to relax; people are exhausted from the lack of income, high inflation, and scarcity of food and goods. May God help the Syrian people; they suffer a lot during this crisis.

Moreover, Khaled considered the need to end the conflict as a logical necessity. This is what he had to say on the issue:

If the opposition and pro-Assad people are sitting at the same table, then all attendees must ask the logical question, who is losing in this conflict? Everyone lost family members, and everyone is suffering. Not only the Sunnis who are dislocated and forced to leave their homes, Alawites people are also dislocated, and had to leave their homes. Both pro-Assad, and anti-Assad are dislocated and left their homes. This is what unites them, and may make them one front. The common loss that both parties are incurring should unite them. If both parties think rationally for ten minutes and look to what happened to the Syrian people, they would unite and work hand in hand. This is what we are missing. The conflict counterparts are not thinking rationally. They are having a bloody mentality. Thinking how to spill bloodshed never leads to solutions.

The study participants call upon the conflict counterparts to halt violence and end the conflict so that people can return and try to pick up their lives where they left off. The ongoing conflict has had devastating outcomes; it destroyed the country, and claimed the life of innocent Syrian people.

5.3 - The Roadmap to Sustainable Peace in Syria- *“Assad needs to step down, military officials who committed atrocities must step down, form a national military, and create a democratic regime based on justice. If these terms are in the peace accord, then all Syrians will support it.”* Oum Hanin.

Building sustainable peace may start with signing a ceasefire agreement, but certainly it does not stop there (Lederach, 1997). Peacebuilding is a lengthy complex process that requires a holistic approach that addresses the grassroots causes that led to the conflict’s eruption in the first place. With this in mind, I asked the study participants to identify the terms of a potential peace accord that could build sustainable peace in a post-peace accord Syria. Perhaps surprisingly, the study participants’ responses reflected a great understanding of conflict and how it should be transformed. Their proposals responded to the root causes and outcomes of the conflict that are identified in chapter four. Their proposals for sustainable peace composed of democratization, the establishment of multi-party political system, demilitarization, the expulsion of all foreign militants and external interventions, the enforcement rule of law, inclusiveness, and equality. For instance, Abu Houssam suggested that any future peacebuilding process must return political power from the regime to the people:

The terms of a future peace accord between the regime and opposition must include the removal of the Assad regime, the prosecution of individuals responsible for atrocities in a fair trial, the release of detainees, the rebuilding Syria, the removal of all external fighters and powers that are operating on Syrian soil such as Russian troops, and Iranian militias, and rebuilding and

reconstructing the Syrian army to become a national force that protects the Syrian people, not the regime... The required steps to reconstruct peace and intergroup peaceful co-existence are enacting a new constitution, organizing free and transparent elections, the removal of the dictator's regime, and putting the political power in the hands of Syrians. Syrians must retain the power and govern themselves by themselves.

Arab autocratic republics have transformed since post-colonial independence, from military coups and counter military coups into *de facto* monarchies, with presidents renewing their dictatorial mandates through orchestrated referendums and constitutional amendments. The average citizens across the Arab world and in Syria have not truly exercised their right to vote freely to elect their fellow citizens to public office. Hence, since the early days of the Arab Spring uprising, protesters chanted primarily for freedom and democracy. As Majd outlined in his story, there has to be a regime change and open and free democratic elections if peace is to reign in Syria:

The Assad regime has been in power for so many years; therefore, it has to resign, and form a new government based on democratic elections. If the opposition and regime reach a peace resolution, the accord must first include the organization of a transparent election, free from manipulation. Syrians should not feel fear or coercion even by 1% when they cast a ballot to choose their elected officials. Secondly, the government must fulfill the needs of Syrian people ... in my opinion, if we have a regime change, and free election, peace will be restored, and people will have the right to live secured.

All the study participants demanded the organization of transparent, free elections in the post-peace accord period and thereafter. In fact, organizing free elections is considered a prerequisite to sustain peace and avoid the recurrence of the conflict. To this point, we could argue that democracies are less likely to erupt into civil war because of checks and balances, and the rotation and the division of power between the executive branch of government, parliament, and judiciary (Paris, 2004; Mac Ginty, 2006). Additionally, democracies tend to have systems, which enable elites to solve their

disputes within the constitutional institutions and according to legal norms, rather than operating outside of them. For example, Abu Houssam noted that the Syrian people desire democracy and freedom:

As a Syrian refugee affected by the conflict, I demand freedom and democracy; I do not want us to return to the old days. We need to have free elections, rotation in power, and allow the most qualified individuals to be elected. The right person for the right position that is what should be applied. We reject corruption and bribes for hiring in government and military jobs, and demand justice for all.

The Assad regime abolished the multi-party political system and designated the Ba'ath party as the sole representative of the Syrian people and the state. Such a system did not allow critical voices and alternative solutions to emerge. In fact, it has created a corrupt political system. Therefore, Abu Hassan demands the creation of a multiparty political system in a post-peace accord Syria in order to have checks and balances, and allow for people's freedom of choice in electing candidates for political office. He cites Lebanon, a relatively stable democratic country with a multiparty political system, as a potential model:

We need to have multiple parties. We need political pluralism in Syria like Lebanon. We need competition and opposition; in Lebanon some parties form the government and other parties remain in the opposition. In Syria, under the Assad regime, if you are not a member in the Ba'ath party, you will never be hired in government jobs.

Another crucially important step on the roadmap to peace in Syria is demilitarization, along with the expulsion of foreign militants. According to the BBC, in 2013, there were more than one thousand militant groups operating in Syria, including terrorist and non-terrorist organizations. Those groups attracted foreign militants from the Global North and the Global South alike and represented a security threat within Syria, to Syria's neighboring countries, and to the entire world. Demilitarization of these groups is a

standard peacebuilding policy in the UN's peacekeeping efforts for post-peace accord societies. Ultimately, it was a top priority for all study participants. For example, Hassan Talib was of the opinion that all foreign combatants need to be forced out of Syria:

As a refugee, I request the end of the war, to expel of foreign powers and fighters from Syrian, and urge all Syrian refugees abroad to return to their home country to rebuild it.

The proliferation of weapons in Syria has made the warring groups resolve their differences on the battlefield, to achieve their shifting goals and to safeguard their interests, rather than to sit together at the negotiation table. Militant groups in Syria, both those who are recognized as moderate as well as extremist terrorist groups, adhere to different, and often conflicting theological and ideological beliefs. Further, various international and regional rivals support many of them. Ending the conflict and building peace ultimately requires surrendering weapons and resolving conflictual issues at the negotiation table. Majd noted, for example, that a peace process must be negotiated and all combat ended in the country:

Syrians must solve the Syrian crisis at the negotiation table without the involvement of external powers. If they want to end the war, people need to concede their weapons and form peace negotiation delegates. Conflict counterparts must follow the demands of Syrians, not the agenda of their foreign sponsors if they want to end the conflict.

All participants condemned the violent attacks of terrorist groups, especially ISIS. In fact, they were aggravated that it is labeled in the media as a Muslim group. Thus, they considered the elimination of ISIS and other terrorist groups to be a top priority for a new Syrian government. For instance, Khaled called for creating a united front that includes the pro-regime forces and moderate rebels to eradicate ISIS:

If I had the chance to sit down and talk to the opposition and the regime, first of all, I will ask them to hold each other's hands, and be one front in order to

expel foreign militia and fighters from Syria, including terrorist organizations, especially ISIS. We need to throw out all the groups. No one knows what is ISIS, and from where it came? We as Muslims, we condemn ISIS's actions, and we do not recognize it. The horrific deeds of ISIS do not reflect the Islamic teachings. What ISIS has done is smearing and discrediting Islam in the world. In my opinion, if the opposition forces and the Assad regime end the war, throw out foreign militias, and together fight ISIS, Syria will be good.

Furthermore, Khaled who identifies himself as part of the anti-Assad regime called for postponing the fight with Assad forces and instead focusing on defeating ISIS:

The removal of foreign militias, the end of foreign intervention, and the elimination of terrorism [...] right now under the current circumstances, Syrians would accept anything, including accepting Bashar to remain as the president of Syria, but with one condition only, if it puts an end to the Russian military intervention, build one front hand-in-hand, to fight ISIS, and expel all militias from Syria.

Step three on the road to peace for Syria centers on building systems committed to equality, inclusiveness, and the rule of law. As Abu Hassan put it, "The peace accord must protect the rights of all Syrians. Equality before the law must be stated clearly in the accord." As illustrated in the previous chapter, the study participants asserted that before the 2011 protests, they lived in a stable society marked largely with peaceful intergroup co-existence. However, they contend that the Assad regime created a sectarian-nepotistic system that infringed on their basic right to equality. As Abu Yahia observed, members of the Alawites community, particularly high-ranking military officers, government official, and members of the Ba'ath party, had extensive privileges compared to the rest of Syrians.

All Syrians must have equal rights. For example, as Sunnis and Alawites and Druze have had the privilege to become military officers, the Kurds also must have the right to serve in the military as officers. Under the Assad regime, the Kurds were obligated to serve in the military, but they were denied the right to be promoted to higher rankings. We must become an inclusive and equal society. Under the Assad regime, Alawites military officers and Alawites

public servants were corrupted and exercised an abuse of power. We need justice and equality. All people must be treated equally. For example, if we are in a line up, no one should have the right to disrespect people in the queue and budge to get served first. Under the Assad regime, an officer, or a son of a minister used to disrespect the people standing in the queue and take their rights. We were not able to look at an officer in the eye, especially, if the officer is Alawites, or knows someone Alawites. We need equality, first come first served rule even if you are the son of the president.

The study participants were aware of the diverse ethnic fabric of their country. Therefore, they emphasized the importance of equality, inclusiveness, and the rule of law in order to rebuild a stable society and a durable peace in post-peace accord Syria. Abu Hassan noted that Syria should emulate and copy Lebanon's successful political system:

Syria is a diverse country; it has different religious and ethnic groups like Lebanon. We need to have a governmental system similar to Lebanon. We should have a federal system and guarantee the representation of all groups and sects in the government [...] We need a new system that divides power and does not lead to a monopoly of power [...] The peace deal must include a fair representation in the government and give every sect its rights.

Likewise, Oum Hamam stressed the need for enforcing equality between all Syrians in spite their group identity:

They need to establish equality between all Syrians. Alawites should not have privileges over Sunnis. Alawites should not be on top and the Sunnis in the ground on the bottom.

Hence, building the legal mechanisms and systemic frameworks that promote equality and inclusiveness in post-peace accord societies is not a luxury; rather, it is a necessity. Majd recognized, for example, that enforcing equality, justice, fairness, and inclusiveness creates the basis of sustainable peace and avoids conflict re-eruption:

Equality and justice create peaceful co-existence. If unfairness and inequality are reinstated, things will get worse. However, if equality and justice are enforced, I do not imagine people would attack and target each other. If there is a government that treats all Syrians equally as one person, everything will be better.

Similarly, Abu Hassan stated that the Syrian people would live peacefully together if all of their rights are respected:

If all people are treated fairly and got their rights, we can co-exist peacefully. If they do not deprive people from their rights, we would live in peace.

Furthermore, Majd highlighted the concept of “civic citizenship” in his narrative that establishes equality between citizens not based on their ethnic and sectarian background, but rather on citizenship naturalization:

Syria is a diverse country, it has many groups, and all of them have the right to live peacefully. All Syrians should be identified as Syrian citizens, not based on their ethnic and religious identity. If sectarianism is eliminated, all people will live in peace. All people have the right to have their own freedom of belief, consciousness and ideas.

Inequality under a sectarian basis not only contributed to conflict eruption, but it also undermined the country’s development potential because qualified individuals were denied appointment in the military and government jobs due to their religious or ethnic identity. Therefore, the study participants highlighted the importance of the concept of meritocracy versus sectarian affiliation as a standard for hiring in government and military jobs. For example, Hassan Talib stated that all Syrian people’s credentials must be recognized in a new democratic state:

Government jobs must be occupied with educated people; everyone gets the job that matches his credentials. The engineer works as an engineer, and the lawyer works as a lawyer. What destroyed Syria was that people did not work in their professions. For example, the medical doctor used to get a job in the Ministry of Justice, the minister of justice is a medical doctor, and the president of the doctors association is an engineer. That is what ruined everything in Syria. If every qualified person got a job that reflects his education and experience, Syria would revive and develop. There are many people who are well educated in Syria. If the war and assassinations end, Syria will revive and return as before. I want to apply equality and respect to all people regardless of their statuses, poor, or rich, or educated, or illiterate. This is the most important thing. Here in Canada, there is respect for human beings, respect for freedom of expression, there is an organized system, there

is rule of law, there is no discrimination based on religious affiliation, this person is Shia, that person is Sunni and so on and so forth. Sectarianism exists only in the Arab countries. In the Arab countries there is chaos. However, here in Canada there is no chaos.

Most of the study participants have lived in Canada for at least two years, and based on their experiences they expressed their admiration of the Canadian system and their desire to implement it in post-peace accord Syria. Abu Sakker articulated that a new Syria must have equality before the law and justice for all Syrians:

To have a long-term peace, we need to have a national unified government, elect a new president democratically from all Syrians, and have an elected parliament. If they do not meet the demands of people with swift justice, equality, equal opportunity, and rule of the law, surely, the conflict in Syria will re-erupt. Canada is a mosaic country, it has people from all over the world, but the rule of the law maintains peace and stability in the country. The law is applied equally on everyone; it started from the Prime Minister downwards on everyone.

Similarly, Khaled also highlighted the need to end all corruption in a new Syria in order to succeed and have social peace like Canada:

If Syria does not have corruption like Canada, Syria would be a great country. Eliminating corruption is essential in order to maintain peace. As I told you, in Syria we had a lot of corruption. For example, a qualified university graduate would work as carpenter, and would be banned from being hired in his field. However, another person who lacks the skills and credentials would take the job because his father bribed the minister or the person who is responsible for hiring. We need to rebuild the economy of our country. Building the economy is the most important thing. Syria is rich with oil, gold and other minerals. Before the revolution, all the resources used to be exported to foreign markets, and Syrians do not get to benefit from the sales revenues. The government used to steal all the sales revenues of natural resources. They need to give Syrians their share of the sales revenues of the natural resources. They need to stop the stealing and corruption.

All participants asserted that building a democratic system that maintains the rule of law, and equality, and tackles corruption and nepotism will create the basis of social peace and contributes to the country's economic success and prosperity.

5.4 - Syrian Diaspora's Roles in Peacebuilding Efforts

Historically, diasporas have contributed both destructively and constructively to conflict trajectories in their respective home countries. The contribution of diaspora activism to conflict resolution includes many roles such as putting pressure on host countries to play a constructive role in peace talks, as well as sending money, weapons, and militants to conflict counterparts that they share identity with. To determine the participants' visions on how they could contribute to peacebuilding in Syria, I asked them how they want to contribute to building sustainable peace there. Most of the study participants emphasized the role of remittances in mitigating the economic difficulties of their relatives that are still in Syria due to food and medicine shortages.

Overall, the participants' responses to their potential roles in peacebuilding processes were divided into two categories. On the one hand, as individuals, they expressed great certitude of their willingness to contribute to peacebuilding efforts. On the other hand, they were skeptical of the collective capacity of the Syrian diaspora to contribute to effective conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes.

5.4.1 - Individual Contributions

All participants hoped for the end of the conflict and for the restoration of peace in their country. In fact, they are committed to support peace even if Assad prevails in his war against the revolutionary rebel groups or remains in power as a result of a peaceful compromise. Some participants emphasized the need to create community-based organizations to support orphans and single mothers, and restore intergroup relationships. However, most participants emphasized the role of individual remittances in poverty

elevation and economic reconstruction and development. For example, Abu Sakker noted that he would work with many people to rebuild a new Syria:

If I return to Syria, I will do the best in my capacity to contribute to reconciliation and the rebuilding of peace and fraternity. I will use my social network. I was known in my community. I will start from the close circle. I will work with my friends, relatives and neighbors, and former colleagues at work to help those who were affected by the war, particularly, orphans. We can create social organizations to help all people who were affected by the war.

Individual remittances represent a significant portion of the GDP of numerous countries. In 2009, the remittances inflow into Syria represented 5.1 percent of the GDP compared to less than 1 percent in 2000 (Mehchy, and Mahdi Doko, 2010, 4). Oum Hamam stated that despite the continuity of the war, Syrians abroad continue to financially support their relatives:

Syrians abroad must support Syrians who remained in Syria financially. Imagine that 1kg of oranges costs 200 Lira, 1kg of sugar is 700 Lira, and 1 liter of cooking oil is 1000 Lira. How could Syrians inside Syria survive if they do not receive financial assistance from outside? Syrians inside Syria rely on the monetary support of their family members and relatives who live outside Syria. Without the financial support of their relatives, Syrians inside Syria would not survive. For example, in Turkey, Syrian refugees organize fundraisers to support their people in their hometowns. Fellow refugees who come from the same towns collect money, and send it to their hometown fellow residents. Likewise, Syrians who live in Saudi Arabia send money to their families in Syria. People require medicine, food, and everything else. They do not have anything. May God provide them and make it easy for them.

Youth play a vital role in peacebuilding processes in the post-peace accord phase. Young refugees who left Syria with their parents to Western hosting countries have acquired knowledge and professional skills that are necessary for state-building, and economic development in a new Syria. Abu Riyad observed that returning refugees would revitalize and rebuild the Syrian economy:

We were expecting that the end of the war and the return of refugees would revive Syria to become better than before. For example, I speak English and Arabic, and those in Germany speak German and Arabic. We are all going to be educated and have money. If we all return to Syria, the country will revive and become better with God's will. We were predicting Syria to become better than before, and become more advanced, great advancement. Syrian refugees are everywhere in the world, we were predicting, if peace is restored, we can rebuild Syria, every refugee would bring to Syria the culture and knowledge of the hosting country to rebuild Syria to become better than before.

Likewise, Khaled stated that the Syrian diaspora would play an important role in the rebuilding of Syria:

I think Syrians abroad can play a very important role in rebuilding Syria if peace is restored because Syrians who are still inside Syria could not continue their education. Syrians who are educated and knowledgeable mostly left Syria. Those who left Syria and finished their education have the skills to return to Syria and rebuild it if peace and reconciliation take place. Syrians abroad will be the backbone of rebuilding Syria.

To explore the participants' support of the end of the conflict and peace, I asked them whether they would support the continuity of the conflict if they disapprove the terms of a potential future peace agreement, or if Assad remains in power. Surprisingly, all participants, including those who explicitly expressed anti-Assad sentiments, unanimously affirmed that they would not support the continuity of the war even if Assad remains in power. For example, Oum Hanin avowed that the majority of Syrians would support a peace agreement that would end the war:

If Assad remains in power in exchange for ending the war and rebuilding the country, a portion of Syrians abroad will accept that. For me I will go with the majority. The majority rules. If the majority of people are satisfied about the peace deal, then we must all support it. The opinion of one person or two would be less important.

Likewise, Khaled stated that Syrians would accept Assad as President if the war ended and a fair and just system was put in place in Syria:

Syrians abroad would accept him [Bashar Assad] to remain in power, because they care about their country. Syrians abroad do not care about Bashar's destiny, but they would care about their country. I personally, do not care about who is the president in charge, but I do care about my country and about ending the war there. Syrians would accept him to remain in power because after 7 years of living in war, you would not only accept Assad as president, you would accept the Pharaoh as the president if he returns to life.

The study participants' certitude about supporting the end of the war in Syria and restoring peace reflects their desire to end the suffering of their family members who are still in Syria. Oum Hamam argued that Syrians continue to suffer as the war rages:

Syrians abroad who have their relatives still in Syria want peace. For example, we have two sons who are still living in Syria. We want them to be safe and live well. We pray to God to extend our age and we can return back to Syria. I am certain that all Syrians pray and hope for peace in Syria to return to their homeland, and meet their relatives.

Similarly, Kamal articulated that the Syrian people want the war to end so that they can get on with their lives:

All Syrians abroad still have family members in Syria. I think all Syrians want the end of the war and peace. I do not think that decent people would like to see the recurrence of killing and destruction. Therefore, I do not think that they would support the continuity of the war.

Despite these hopes, the vast majority of the study participants asserted that even if they reject the terms of a potential peace agreement, or if Assad remained in power as a result of political compromise, refugees would not return to Syria, because they fear prosecution and vengeance from Assad regime supporters. Kamal suggested that the Syrian diaspora would not be able to return to Syria if the Assad regime remains intact:

If Assad remains in power, Syrians abroad will not be able to return to Syria. Syrian refugees want the end of the war. They do not have the financial resources to support themselves. If they have the capacity to remove Assad, they would do anything.

In contrast, Abu Houssam notes that ordinary Syrian refugees will not support the continuity of conflict. However, members of the opposition, particularly, in Turkey and Jordan would continue their struggle against the Assad regime:

I do not think Syrians abroad would do anything to support the continuity of the war even if they reject a potential peace agreement, except the members of the opposition who are abroad; particularly, Syrians who are in Turkey and in proximity with the Turkish-Syrian borders, they might do anything. The majority of the opposition are in Turkey. Syrians in Turkey are organized, and have the ability to play a role in that regard. However, Syrians in Lebanon are oppressed and powerless. In Jordan, they are organized and have the ability to play a role in the failure of any future peace deal if they reject its terms. Both Turkey and Jordan share borders with Syria, the opposition still controls the shared borders with both countries. In Jordan, they still have a tribal system, like the province of Daraa where the uprising started. Therefore, Syrians in both countries have a role to play, but Syrians who are far away in Europe and other places do not have a role to play.

All participants strive for peace in Syria. In fact, they are willing to support the end of war even if they disapproved a potential peace accord, or if Assad remains in power. They know that if Assad remained in power as president of Syria, they will not be able to return to their communities. Nonetheless, they are willing to make that sacrifice in order to help their extended family members who are still in Syria, and their suffering under the war.

5.4.2 - Syrian Diaspora's Collective Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding Capacities

Analyzing the collective capacity of the Syrian diaspora to contribute to conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Syria requires an accurate picture of the size of the Syrian diaspora, its organizational capabilities, and its ethnopolitical and economic makeup. Unfortunately, there is less literature about the size of the Syrian diaspora and its distribution around the world. Also, the Syrian government did not provide accurate

statistics about Syrians living abroad before the 2011 uprising. Certainly, this is an area of research that requires more interest from researchers.

In 2010, the Syrian Ministry of Expatriates estimated the number of Syrians living abroad to be nearly 15 million. However, Jamal Barrout (2008) estimates the total number of Syrians abroad since the mid-19th century to be 9.8 million (Mehchy & Mahdi Doko, 2010, 2). Syria's sociopolitical conditions since the mid-19th century played a major role in determining the type and size of migration from the country. There have been four major waves of migration from Syria: the first started in the mid-19th century to North and South America, Europe and Australia seeking better economic prospects. The second occurred between 1958 and the 1970s to Lebanon, Arab Gulf countries and Europe to avoid the rigid socialist regulations. It primarily included entrepreneurs and professionals. The third wave started in the late 1980s and the main destination was Lebanon (to replace labour shortages that followed the Lebanese Civil War) and to the Arab Gulf countries (Mehchy & Mahdi Doko, 2010, 2). The fourth wave started in 2011 onwards with the escalation of the civil war (UNHCR, 2018).

Overall, data from the World Bank and the Consortium for Applied Research in International Migration (CARIM) suggests that 75 percent of Syria's total population living abroad since the mid-19th century had moved to Arab countries (Mehchy & Mahdi Doko, 2010, 3). Therefore, the Syrian diaspora in Western countries is relatively new and less established compared to Irish, Jewish, and Chinese diasporas, for example. This newness helps explain its lack of organizational capabilities and political influence on the governments of host countries. Accordingly, all of the study participants unanimously asserted that the Syrian diaspora is not united, does not have organizational structures,

and lacks noticeable influence in host countries. For example, Majd observed that the Syrian diaspora is not united:

Syrians abroad are not organized in a united body. I have not seen any organization led by Syrians abroad that leads Syrians or has an influence to help Syrians obtain their demands and rights. For example, if the Syrian diaspora in Canada is organized and delivered their demands and position to people, they will be able to change the views of all Canadian people. They could do the same thing in Germany and everywhere else. They could change the views of the people in the host countries and gain their support.

Likewise, Khaled noted that the Syrian diaspora has little influence in host nations:

Until now, the Syrian diaspora does not have any influence at all. The Syrians abroad are not organized well enough because each person is living alone in isolation disregarding the needs of others.

The term “diaspora” does not infer necessarily unity and homogeneity. In fact, diaspora communities are heterogeneous. In other words, they mirror the socioeconomic cleavages that exist in any given society. Therefore, diaspora communities are also subject to divisions along sociopolitical positions that exist in their home countries. As such, Syrians living abroad are divided largely into two groups: the anti-Assad regime enclave and the pro-regime group. That division is not necessarily attributed to sectarian and religious identity, because unlike in Syria, there are Sunnis who are pro-Assad and anti-Assad. Hence, Abu Houssam contended that Syrians living abroad reflect the ongoing political division in their country:

The Syrian diaspora is not organized because within Syrians abroad, there are contradictions, some people are still pro-Assad regime, and some are anti-Assad. Even those who are pro-Assad are not organized to do anything to support the regime financially or morally. In my view, Syrians abroad are organized in regions that are close to the Syrian borders, but elsewhere, they are not organized.

In contrast, Kamal argues that the lack of organizational capacities and the influence of Syrian diaspora in host countries stems from the lack of education amongst refugees, as well as the daily socioeconomic challenges they have encountered since their arrival:

I do not think that Syrians abroad are organized, nor [do they] have the capacity to play a role in the conflict because the vast majority of Syrian refugees are not well educated. More than 95% of refugees came from rural regions in Syria. Most of the Syrian refugees face challenges in integration in their hosting countries because they lack education; some of them experience cultural shock, and might return to Syria if the war ends.

Nonetheless, despite the Syrian diaspora's lack of organizational structures, all participants stressed the importance of diaspora members providing sustenance and economic support to their fellow Syrians now and in the post-peace accord era, and conveying the collective suffering of Syrians in zones of conflict inside Syria to the world. Kent (2006, 449-469) studied the contribution of Bosnian diaspora networks in Britain to peacebuilding during the post-1995 Dayton peace accord. He concluded that Bosnian diaspora networks did not have the political power to lobby governments in host countries or with international agencies, as it was the case with Jewish and Armenian diasporas. However, the individual remittances of Bosnians to their families, direct foreign investments, the rebuilding of schools and religious institutions, and financing the return of refugees to their communities contributed significantly to peacebuilding and the economic development of Bosnia after the war. For example, Abu Hassan called on the Syrian diaspora to send financial assistance to their families back in Syria:

Syrians outside Syria must support their fellow Syrian inside Syria financially. Syrians outside Syria are not fully aware about the situation on the ground. For example, the United Nations tries to mitigate the suffering of Syrians and provide them with food and water supplies. But unfortunately, that assistance does not always reach the hands of people who are truly in need and goes to the hands of thieves. We are aware of the needs of our

people and our country. And we will do our best to help them and rebuild our country.

Abu Houssam argued that the Syrian diaspora played a crucial role during the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons against civilians. Syrians abroad were able to mobilize collective support in their respective host countries to condemn the use of chemical weapons against noncombatants:

Syrians abroad have the ability to play a role and put pressure on the governments of the hosting countries to engage in the conflict. That happened in multiple cases during the chemical weapons attacks against civilians. Syrians in many parts of the world protested in front of parliaments in their host countries condemning the use of chemical weapons against civilians. The governments of the hosting countries have a role to play in the Syrian crisis, but they act only during incidents that have a strong echo, such as the usage of the chemical weapons in the Ghouta. In that incident, they reacted for a couple days, then they turned silent as before and forgot the subject. I do not think Syrians can have a prominent pressure on the governments of the host countries. In my view, the opposite could happen because in Western societies you need to get authorizations in order to organize protests. In my opinion, rallies and protests [there] are symbolic.

Participants' self-awareness about the lack of organizational structures, in-group unity, and political influence in host countries stimulates a desire to overcome the current limitations. For instance, Oum Hanin averred that the Syrian diaspora must be politically active in the host countries to shine a light on what is really happening on the ground in Syria:

The Syrian diaspora needs to unite and have one hand in each country. They need to explain to ordinary people the situation in Syria, and what should be done to restore peace and stability. They should make an effort to influence the governments of the host countries in order to support their goals. For example, if the size of the Syria diaspora is large, they need to explain to the governments of the host countries that what has occurred in Syria is a tragedy and that they need to work individually and collectively with other governments to rebuild peace and put pressure on the Assad regime to end the conflict.

Likewise, Abu Sakker agreed that the Syrian diaspora should put political pressure on host governments and inform the people of events shaping the civil war in Syria:

There are around 6 million Syrians who currently outside Syria. Syrian diaspora should put pressure on the governments of their hosting countries. They need to be more effective to put pressure on the host governments to help the Syrian people and put an end to their collective suffering.

The established members of the Syrian diaspora who left Syria before the uprising play influential leadership roles in the Syrian opposition. In fact, some members of the opposition have spent the majority of their lives outside of Syria. Consequently, the opposition itself, or some wings of the opposition, has the challenge of living in proximity to, and connecting with the new members of Syrian diaspora. As a result, some of the study participants raised the issue of the legitimacy of the opposition in terms of its representation of ordinary Syrian peoples' needs and demands. Therefore, Hassan Talib contended that it seems that both the regime and some opposition groups face a legitimacy crisis:

Frankly, I am 40 years old. I heard the names of some of the opposition leaders just in the last five years. The question here is, where was this opposition before? The real opposition should emerge from within the people, not from abroad. Where is the opposition? Those who appear on TV are not the opposition. Some of the [alleged] opposition spent 25 to 30 years of their lives outside Syria. The time Syrian people were suffering inside Syria under war and scarcity of food, those who consider themselves opposition were living a luxury life in hotels in Turkey, England, France, Egypt and Jordan. Those are not supposed to be called the opposition.

Also, Abu Hassan noted that a majority of Syrians are not enamored by the Syrian opposition who have not assisted the Syrian people caught up in the civil war:

Most Syrians are not satisfied about the Syrian opposition coalition. We call the members of the coalition, the opposition of hotels. They live in hotels [and] they do not know about our needs. These people are not helping us. When Khaled Khouja, was the president of the opposition coalition, he came to visit us in the refugees' camp in Turkey. He did not ask about our needs as

refugees. He came to take pictures with the President of Turkey, Erdogan. The opposition coalition did not do anything to support or assist Syrian refugees in need. They did not even care to listen to our needs.

The Syrian diaspora residing in Western host societies is still in the process of establishing itself and building its organizational structures. It lacks the political influence and economic power that Jewish, Irish, and Tamil diasporas have had. Therefore, the Syrian diaspora is less likely to contribute to the political trajectories of the ongoing conflict. Nonetheless, the role of its members now and in the potential post peace accord society is vital. In particular, the individual remittances continue to contribute to poverty alleviation, and economic development.

5.5 - External Powers' Role in Syria's Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding-*"The world superpowers, specifically Russia and the United States, will determine the future of Syria" Abu Masen*

Ample research concludes that third party intervention, particularly that of foreign governments, in interstate and intrastate conflict could be either constructive in the case of mediating and facilitating peace talks or in providing incentives to warring parties to reach a peace agreement; or it can be destructive in the case of spoiling the peace process by supporting conflict counterparts to sustain the conflict (Kriesberg, 2011). There are no research-based evidence or government reports that suggest that the Syrian diaspora is playing a destructive role in the ongoing civil war in Syria. However, there is palpable evidence that suggests the destructive role played by external international and regional powers in the ongoing Syrian civil war (Deutsche Welle, 2018; Foreign Policy, 2018). As discussed in chapter four, all participants believe that Syria is a battlefield for a proxy war between regional and global powers. Regional rivalry between Saudi Arabia and its

allies, and Iran with its sponsored militias, and international rivalry between Russia and China, and the US and its Western allies have contributed significantly to the deterioration of the conflict in Syria.

As the conflict extends over time, people are more likely to lose hope in ending the conflict and restoring peace. At the time of conducting this research, the Syrian civil war had surpassed 7 years and six months. Thus, all study participants were skeptical about the possibility of ending the conflict via the ongoing un-backed peace talks. They depict the peace talks as, “endless TV series,” “useless,” “a joke,” “a waste of time,” and “unproductive.” For instance, Khaled argued that the peace negotiations are a farce because the global; community does not care about the plight of the ordinary civilians:

I am dissatisfied about the peace negotiation process because if the negotiations were serious, the war would have ended a long time ago. The ongoing negotiations aims to calm people, and send an indication to the people that we are negotiating for peace because we care about the well-being of Syrians who are still inside Syria. However, in reality, no one cares about Syrians inside. No one supports Syrians who are still inside Syria. The peace negotiations are lies and lies.

Similarly, Hassan Talib stated that people are frustrated and have little hope that the peace negotiations will succeed:

Honestly, the peace negotiations are like a television series that has so many seasons. I am not satisfied about the peace negotiations. I do not believe they will reach an agreement. I do not follow Syria’s news any more. We got bored about what is happening. In the first year of the conflict, I used to follow the news closely, because we had hope that the conflict would end and Syria would revive and become even better. But, until now no progress has been achieved. On the contrary, day after day, the situation becomes worse than the day before. We have witnessed the Geneva Peace Conference, round 1 and round 2. But till now nothing changed on the ground. The leaders of the opposition changed many times, and until now, there are no results.

Also, Oum Hanin suggested that the Syrian government and the external powers have no interest in stopping the war as the people suffer on a day-to-day basis:

I do follow the news and negotiations between the regime and the opposition, but I think that negotiation is useless; it is a joke. It gives false hope to Syrian people. I am certain that if they want to stop the war and bloodshed, they would have done that a long time ago. The opposition outside Syria is not effective. They enjoy their time in hotels, eating and drinking. Syrian people are paying the price, Syrian people who are suffering and battered.

All study participants unanimously expressed their dissatisfaction with the outcomes of the ongoing peace negotiations process. In fact, they all believed that ending the conflict is neither in the hands of Assad nor the opposition. Rather, Hassan Talib noted that the cessation of the conflict rests in the hands of external international and regional powers:

Honestly, let me tell you something. Let's talk about the opposition. The opposition is not united. Within the opposition, there are groups. Each group would have 10 or 15 members sponsored by a foreign power, and when they talk, they express the views and agendas of their sponsors. For example, 20 or 30 members of the opposition are sponsored by Saudi Arabia. Therefore, they say whatever Saudi Arabia tells them. Likewise, you will find groups sponsored by the United States, Europe, Iraq, Iran, and Qatar. Each group expresses the views of its sponsor. Since the early days of the uprising, the opposition was not in agreement. Personally, I do not recognize the opposition, because it is not united.

Similarly, Kamal observed that external power and militant groups are manipulating the opposition and Assad's regime that is mere pawns in a proxy war between sectarian religions, and East-West powerful states:

In my opinion, the peace negotiations are a joke. I am displeased about the outcomes of the UN sponsored peace talks. I am displeased about the peace negotiations because I think Assad's representatives and opposition representatives are like actors in a play. Both parties are tools in the hands of foreign powers, especially the opposition. The opposition is divided into several groups. It is not united. One foreign power or more supports each group of the opposition. They are not independent, and they do not represent the Syrian people. The Syrian citizens want the war to end and live in peace, not in chaos and killing, and terrorism. The opposition delegates are not independent. They do not go to the negotiations to present their own agenda.

In fact, their foreign guarantors set their proclaimed agenda. The opposition groups reflect the vision of their external guarantors. The groups that are supported by Saudi Arabia reflect the vision of Saudi Arabia, and the group that is by Qatar reflects the vision of Qatar. If the opposition delegates do not deliver the vision of their external guarantors, they lose the political support and weapons and money supply.

External international and regional powers such as Russia, Turkey, the US, and Iran and its sponsored militias, especially Hezbollah, have a physical military presence in Syria. However, Saudi Arabia, France, the UK, Qatar and also the US have an indirect military presence through their sponsorship of various militant groups that compete against each other for territory and resource acquisitions. Therefore, Abu Hassan hoped that the conflict counterparts put Syria's interests above their agendas and their sponsors:

If people value their personal interests over the country's interests, we will not have peace. Today, there are what I call warlords who are supported by either Iran, or Saudi Arabia, or Qatar. We are lost now.

Abu Houssam feared that the continuity of conflict could lead to the partition of Syria into spheres of influence controlled by external regional and international powers:

In my view, Syria will be divided into small states. That is my own analysis. I expect that Syria will be divided like Iraq. Iraq is divided into three parts, Kurdish territory, Sunni territory, and Shia territory. Only God knows how many parts Syria will be divided into.

Likewise, Hassan Talib stated that Syria would be carved up among the rival external powers:

In my opinion, Syria is heading towards partition; it will be divided between America, Russia, Iran, the Kurds, and the Sunnis. All honest Syrians who have integrity reject this scenario, but foreign powers are pursuing it with some Syrians' hands [support].

Therefore, all study participants assert that resolving the ongoing conflict requires first and foremost the willingness and commitment of external international and regional powers to end conflict and initiate peacebuilding processes. For example, Hana noted that

the external powers have their own interests in stake in the Syrian conflict with no interest in protecting the Syrian people:

External powers have the capacity to end the conflict in Syria, but they chose not to end it. They may interfere to end the conflict if they fulfill their needs and achieve all their interests. They let the conflict escalate because they had pre-set goals that they wanted to achieve. Enough is enough; shame on them. They have to end the war. No one could bear what happened in Syria. If what happened in Syria happened somewhere else, no one would be able to endure it. Do they still need more time to end the war? Seven years is not enough. Except if they have pre-existing agendas and goals.

Likewise, Abu Houssam stated that both superpowers and Iran want Syria to remain destabilized as it suits their interests:

In my opinion, the peace negotiations are useless; they will not achieve any results. Ending the Syrian conflict is in the hands of Russia and United States. If they want to end it, they could do so. If the external powers, particularly, Russia, Iran, and America agree on a resolution, the conflict would end. One word from them would end the conflict. But, on the contrary, they want the extension of the conflict. If the United Nations and world superpowers agreed on a resolution, the conflict would have ended. The conflict will not end because the superpowers Russia and United States are in competition over Syria. They disagree about Syria to serve their own national interests. But, we as Syrians pay the price. We are losing our country because of international politics and competition over national interests.

Hassan Talib explicitly concluded as well that if Russia and the US end their proxy war and support a peace process then the civil war would end in Syria:

If the United States and Russia do not come to an agreement, there will never be peace and reconciliation in Syria.

Ultimately, ending the conflict and building a durable peace requires the commitment and support of external guarantors to the peace process. This fact does not deny the responsibility of the conflict counterparts and elites in peacebuilding efforts. For example, Kamal noted that if Russia and the US want the civil war to end, then it would end:

Rebuilding peace will require an effort from all Syrians. After the ceasefire, all conflict counterparts on the ground should have flexibility and give concessions. That is what we hope for. But, in reality, what Russia and USA agree upon and want will eventually happen.

Also, Hassan Talib articulated that with the assistance of the Syrian diaspora then the country could be rebuilt in twenty years time:

There will be no such a thing called Syria for 20 years. We will need 20 years to rebuild Syria. Syrians abroad could support Syria financially. But, that will take time. You will need a strong and organized diaspora to do that.

At the time of writing this thesis, in the summer of 2018, Assad forces supported by Russian forces, Iranian forces, and sponsored militias successfully retook the Daraa province from the opposition, the birthplace of the Syrian Uprising. After negotiations with the Assad regime, rebel groups agreed to surrender their heavy artillery, in exchange for safe passage to Northern territories that are still controlled by rebels groups supported by Turkey (*The Irish Times*, 2018). Such an outcome indicates, according to analysts, the near end of the Syrian civil war and the subsequent victory of Assad. Certainly, Russian intervention in Syria in 2015 saved the Assad regime from inevitable collapse, and empowered him to defeat his opponents. Abu Hassan believed that Russian military operations would end the conflict by eliminating militant groups who oppose the end of conflict:

I think that Russia is the most equipped country to help Syria. Unfortunately, the Arabs have not done much for Syria. It is true that Russia attacks Syrian territory with air strikes, but I think it is necessary to do so. Russia attacks those extremists who oppose the peace process. Russia is using the hammer policy in Syria. It kills all those who stand in its way.

All participants asserted that the end of the ongoing conflict in Syria is in the hands of international and regional powers. The warring parties act as agents of multiple external

guarantors. Thus, a potential political compromise between the US and its Western allies, and mainly Russia could secure the end of the conflict.

5.6 - Key Findings of the Research

The study participants' perceptions of peacebuilding reflect their experiences, losses and future hopes. All participants have close family members who are either still in Syria, and/or living in one of the neighboring countries, or they have moved to a European country. Therefore, they perceived that peacebuilding meant the end of the war, and the ability to return to their communities and reunite with their siblings, and relatives. However, it meant the restoration of intergroup peaceful co-existence to others, and mutual respect of all Syrians as noted by Kamal, Abu Hassan, and Abu Sakker. All participants expressed their desire to return to their communities in Syria to rebuild their lives. In fact, Oum Hamam noted that she prays for the end of the conflict because she wishes to live the rest of her life in her town in Syria, and to be buried there. However, young participants such as Khaled and Abu Riyad want to return to Syria to transfer their educational knowledge and experiences that they gained in Canada and contribute to reconstruction and economic development processes.

Civilians, in zones of conflict incur major losses, experience traumatic events, and struggle and experience hardships in their displacement journeys. Therefore, they are the first beneficiaries of the peace dividends. All study participants pray for the end of the civil war in Syria, and the restoration of peace because they want to end the suffering of their family members and fellow Syrians who are still inside Syria. In fact, the disastrous consequences of the conflict on Syrian civilians made some participants revise their

political positions and denounce the anti-Assad protests, while others expressed remorse for believing in the possibility of reforming/changing the regime. Ironically, participants like Hana, Khaled, Oum Hanin, and Hassan Talib rejected the socioeconomic and political status quo before 2011 and had the aspiration to live in a just society (positive peace). However, they noted today that they wish that the protests did not happen in Syria in the first place. As Khalid noted, the damage that the war caused in Syria would make Syrians even accept the Pharaoh as Syria's president if that would mean the end of the conflict. In other words, today, due to the wretchedness of the war, a segment of Syrians would prefer to live under the "negative peace" conditions that existed before 2011 so long as there was not a large-scale form of violence (war) in the country.

After seven years of war, the Assad regime and its external allies (Iran, Hezbollah, and Russia) mostly succeeded in prevailing not only against the rebels, but also, in crushing ordinary Syrians' hope to live in a just, and democratic society. The Arab Spring uprising in Syria and other MENA countries was a popular social movement that condemned totalitarianism, corruption, and political violence, and encouraged the people's aspirations for freedom, equality, democracy, and the rule of law. However, the unwillingness of Western powers who claim to be the advocates of "self-determination, democracy, and human right" to endorse the Arab youths' calls for democratization, and socioeconomic reform, and its in/direct support of the Arab Spring counter-movement has contributed to the dramatic violent outcomes of the uprisings, and the continuity of the same root causes that instigated the protests in the MENA region in the first place.

For decades, Arab authoritarian regimes promoted themselves to Western powers as guarantors of stability in order to secure more foreign aid and less criticism of their

oppressive regimes policies and poor records of human rights and human development. That pragmatic/realist mutual agreement has created the root causes of social unrest, and instability in various MENA countries as well as in other parts in the world. Therefore, the use of realism and national interests as justification to tolerate human rights violations and oppressions creates the conditions for extremism, radicalization, and justifies the people's use of violence to change the perceived unjust status quo's. Thus, peacebuilding missions need to be free of political and geopolitical calculations and interests because peace agreements that have resulted out of a balance of power and political influence have established fragile peace in numerous post-peace accord societies.

Building sustainable peace in post-peace accord societies requires a holistic multilevel approach that addresses the root causes of conflict and its implications for peace. A key finding in this study is the ability of locals in affected zones of conflict to conduct a thorough conflict analysis of the situation and to propose a peaceful resolution. Locals in zones of conflict can identify the hidden causes of conflict and its consequences, and propose solutions to address them in contrast to outsiders who may lack the cultural understanding, and/or unwritten knowledge and history. In this study, participants, sufficiently, identified the root causes of conflict that instigated the protests in 2011 that escalated into a protracted violent conflict, and they proposed solutions to address them, as well as address the humanitarian outcomes of the civil war.

For example, they identified the lack of democracy and regular free elections as the key causes that instigated the 2011 protests, and they proposed the organization of free and transparent elections, and the creation of a multi-party political system to build a long-lasting peace in post-peace accord Syria. Bashar Assad succeeded his father as the

President of Syria through hereditary succession using a referendum to justify the move. He banned political parties, and did not tolerate the existence of any political opposition. As Kamal noted, the members of the parliament were a part of the regime's façade. Thus, they did not exercise their roles in scrutinizing the government's management of the state's affairs. In fact, they were opportunists who used their political positions to serve their own personal interests. The absence of free regular elections at the national, governorate and local levels did not enable qualified individuals to assume leadership positions, and therefore, did not create the opportunity for the emergence of alternative solutions to the country's problems and challenges. Also, space was not created for the emergence of experienced political elites/oppositions that would have scrutinized local, regional, and national governments' spending and the efficiency of its managements and policies. That status quo fostered corruption, created a culture of immunity for state officials, and undermined accountability, transparency, and the rule of law.

Further, the lack of a democratic life in the country led to the absence of a culture of difference. In other words, the absence of political dialogue, political parties, and the suppression of freedom of speech in any given society leads to authoritarianism, and the inability to tolerate indifferent positions and solve disputed/disagreements peacefully within the state's institutions and according to its national laws. Political opponents in democratic societies resolve their disputes in their parliaments, abide by the constitution's terms, and adhere to the decisions of a free and impartial judiciary system. On the contrary, the political system that Assad's regime created did not allow the emergence of diverse-experienced political elites and parties that believes in political dialogue and peaceful management of differences/disputes. Moreover, it did not allow the emergence

of alternative ideas and policies to handle the country's social, economic, and political problems and challenges. Thus, the lack of the country's elites political experience, and the predominance of the authoritarian and exclusionist mindset means that Syria's transition towards democracy in a post-peace accord milieu is more likely to be slow, and even violent, unless the country's political elite agree upon a political pact that regulates the transition period and manages disputed peacefully (see Mac Ginty, 2006, 49-53).

All study participants expressed with certitude their willingness to support potential conflict resolution processes in Syria and to participate in the peacebuilding efforts. In fact, even participants who expressed an anti-Assad sentiment noted that they would support the end of the conflict even if that meant Assad maintains his position as the president of Syria. All participants asserted that Syrians support the end of the war because they want to end the suffering of their siblings, relatives, and fellow Syrians who are still living inside Syria. For example, Oum Hamam noted that without the financial support that Syrians living abroad provided to their relatives residing inside Syria, they would not have survived and afforded to purchase their basic needs such as bread, sugar, and gasoline. Thus, the fact that Syrian refugees financially support their relatives in Syria means that they are invested in peace, and their remittances contribute to their poverty alleviation.

This finding means that supporting Syrian refugees financially means they are directly supporting their family members in their home country. This positive outcome suggests that organizations and governments need to revise their aid approaches by increasing their support to refugees because allocating more financial allowances and grants to refugees enables them to help their families who are still living in zones of

conflict. Adopting this approach would save the aid institutions the administration fees that are required for aid transfer, increase aid efficiency, and avoid the risk that humanitarian aid personnel face in zones of conflict.

The Syrian Diaspora is less established in Western societies and lacks the political and economic influence compared to other diaspora groups like the American Irish, and American Jews. Nonetheless, it has played a significant role in the course of the conflict. Syrian activists abroad still maintain strong connections with activists and rebels fighting inside Syria. Therefore, they have access to materials that document the devastating effects of the ongoing civil war on civilian victims. Those activists help expose the horrors of the conflict by sharing stories with the international media through social media as well as the pictures of war victims especially during horrific attacks such as chemical attacks. That coordination between Syrians living abroad and activists who are still in Syria helps expose the regime and other militant groups' gruesome human rights violations, and thereby mobilizes international pressure on the Assad regime and other militant groups that defy the rules of international humanitarian law. The outcomes of that work led to the formation of human rights investigative committees, the assembly of the UN Security Council on multiple occasions, the organization of international peace conferences, and the launch of military air strikes against Assad, and ISIS, and other terrorist operatives in the country.

All participants noted that the international powers (Russia, and US) and regional powers (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Israel, Iran, Turkey, Iran, and Hezbollah) have played a destructive role in the conflict. Nonetheless, they concluded that ending the ongoing conflict (peacemaking) is not in the hands of the conflict parties. Instead it is in the hands

of international and regional powers, namely, the US, and Russia. Therefore, halting violence (peacemaking) and peacebuilding in Syria will require the transformation of the destructive role of external powers into constructive role by ending military, political, and financial support to warring parties, and the support of peacebuilding efforts (UN-backed peace talks, and trust-building). The regional rivalry between Saudi Arabia, and Iran, and between the US and Russia, and geopolitical interests/concerns of Turkey and Israel turned Syria into a battleground and a proxy war. Saudi Arabia and other Sunni Arab states have supported Sunni-led rebels, and Iran, and Hezbollah (Shia powers) have supported the Assad regime. Likewise, the US and Western powers have supported the moderate opposition, and the Kurds. However, Russia has supported the Assad regime military forces. On the other hand, Turkey supports the opposition mainly the Syrian Free Army and intervened in northern Syria to prevent the Kurdish militant groups from seizing control over Syria's northern territories. Similarly, Israel has conducted military air strikes targeting pro-Assad forces, Hezbollah forces, Iran sponsored militias, and rebels that threaten its presence in the Golan Height that it has occupied since the 1967 Six Days War. Therefore, geopolitics, national interests, and sectarianism have led to external interventions in Syria contributing to the deterioration of the conflict. All of the external powers justify their military interventions under international counterterrorism efforts in Syria. However, Syria became a safe heaven for terrorist organizations like ISIS in late 2013. In short, all of my interviewees condemned the destructive roles of the regional and international powers in the conflict. Nonetheless, they asserted that ending the conflict and building a long-lasting sustainable peace in a post-peace accord milieu will require a political compromise between the US and Russia. If both countries reach a

resolution, then it is more likely that the conflict parties will be pressured by them to reach a peace agreement.

5.7 - Conclusion

This chapter presented the participants' experiences and perceptions of peacebuilding and the role of external powers in the conflict dynamics. The participants' proposals to end the conflict and build a sustainable peace in post-peace accord Syria stems from their personal experiences in Syria, as well as their needs, hopes, and fears. Under the Assad ruling dynasty, Syrians did not have the right to freely elect state officials including the president, and they lacked their public and political liberties such as freedom of expression, and they experienced oppression, discrimination, and injustice. Therefore, all study participants advocated for equality, democracy, the rule of law, inclusiveness, demilitarization, and a constructive role for international and regional powers to end the conflict, reconstruct Syria and build a long-lasting peace.

CHAPTER 6 – SYRIAN DIASPORA’S PERCEPTIONS AND AGENCY IN TRANSFORMATIONAL AND RECONCILIATION PROCESSES

6.1 - Introduction

This chapter discusses the participants’ perceptions and experience with regards to reconciliation and conflict transformation processes in a potential post-peace accord Syria. Numerous societies in the Global North and Global South have experienced periods of political violence under authoritarian regimes, which sometimes included systemic racism against a particular ethnic group, and violent ethno-political conflicts (civil war). Thus, new post-peace accord governments in transition to democracy have adopted transitional justice mechanisms, either retributive justice (ad hoc national/international courts), or non-retributive mechanisms such as truth-telling commissions, and Indigenous peacemaking processes, or a combination of both systems (hybrid justice system) to address past unlawful human rights atrocities, ultimately, seeking reconciliation and healing. The intensity of ethno-political conflicts creates deep intergroup psychosocial barriers that can spoil and undercut the peacebuilding and conflict transformation efforts in post-peace accord. Therefore, building sustainable peace in post-violent societies requires the implementation of adequate and efficient policies that respond to individual and collective traumatic experiences, and address the conflict’s root causes.

Knowing that this is a key component of lasting peace, I asked the study participants to define reconciliation, and how to pursue it and achieve its goals. Since all participants asserted that the conflict has damaged the intergroup peaceful co-existence, amity and cooperation, the follow-up questions I asked them were, is it possible to restore

that intergroup peaceful co-existence and cooperation that they felt existed before the 2011 uprising? What should be done to achieve that goal? And what role they intended to play in that process? Three major themes emerge inductively from the data: 1) The Syrian diaspora's perceptions about reconciliation, 2) conflict transformation and intergroup relationship restoration, and 3) Syria's possible paths towards reconciliation, including healing and forgiveness, retributive transitional justice, traditional conflict resolution processes, and peace education.

6.2 - Syrian Diaspora's Perceptions About Reconciliation

As illustrated in chapter one, historical context, according to international human rights organizations reports about Syria, and international media and newspapers reports, the warring parties in Syria (Assad forces, rebels, and terrorist organizations, namely ISIS and Jabhat Al-Nusra) and their external allies have systematically committed grave human rights atrocities that fall under war crimes and crimes against humanity (UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria, 2016; the UN Human Rights Council, 2016; UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2016; UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2017; Human Rights Watch, 2016; Amnesty International report, 2017; Rosen, 2016; BBC, 2015; The Wall Street Journal, 2014; Aljazeera, 2016). The reports of those organizations included the systemic use of the following unlawful tactics; indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian sites, the besiegement of civilians, the use of chemical weapons, the arbitrary arrest and torture of detainees, capital punishment, and death in custody, as well as rape and sexual slavery against members of minority groups.

Stephen O'Brien, under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator summed up the humanitarian situation in Syria before the UN Security Council on March 30, 2017 stating, "in Syria, there is not a man, woman or child from any walk of life who hasn't been impacted by the particular wretchedness of this particularly gruesome and protracted conflict" (UN ReliefWeb, 2017). Therefore, the interview questions, and unwritten follow-up questions did not ask participants about their traumatic experiences in their displacement journeys in zones of conflict in Syria because there have been already enough evidence to establish the failure of all warring parties with respect to their moral and international human rights obligations (see UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria reports, 2015-2016; UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2017; Human Rights Watch, 2016; Amnesty International report, 2017). The interview questions were intended to be open-ended. Thus, I neither encouraged participants to share their traumatic experiences, nor discouraged them from doing so since the interviews' settings were safe and secure, and were an opportunity for interviewees to have a voice and an impact through the storytelling of their experiences. Hence, I listened intuitively, and respectfully to participants who chose to share their experiences. For example, Abu Hassan discussed his traumatic experience and fear from indiscriminate air attacks in the following way:

I am still traumatized from bombs and sound of explosives. When I was in Syria, I did not get scared when Assad forces attacked the Syrian Free Army in a battlefield. I was terrified from the indiscriminate attacks. What scary was you being at your home sitting peacefully, and a rocket or a bomb targets your house. When we were in Syria, the Assad forces used to launch rockets indiscriminately towards our region from the Military College Base in Homs.

Likewise, Hana shared her experience of when she was still in Syria and went to the hospital to visit her injured sister who lost her leg due to an indiscriminate attack that

targeted their family residence. Hana was horrified to see her fellow Syrian citizens and youth suffer from fatal and serious injuries due to indiscriminate attacks on their homes, and neighborhoods:

They used air strikes to scare people. We as adults were not able to bear what happened, what about children? Lot of children lost their sight, hearing, their hands, and their feet. People lost a lot of things. If you go to the hospital, you would see people in situations that would burn your heart. You will be horrified from what you will see; you will not believe what has happened to Syria and its people. For example, one time I went to the hospital, I was horrified from what I saw. I was going to faint. I started crying. I cried over Syria's youth. Children in the age of flowers had lost their legs and arms. What did those children do? What harm or mistakes had they committed to suffer like that? What would Bashar do if one of his kids were injured? What would other high-ranking officials do if they see their children badly injured? Any decent human being will be hurt if he loses loved ones. My sister lost her leg in this war – could they reinstate her leg to its place? They could not, because her leg is lost. Syria is almost completely destroyed, except if it is ruled by a qualified president who could help it revive and stand back up on its feet again, reinstate security and safety, and look after his own people.

Similarly, Oum Hamam shared with me the story of her nephew who was arbitrarily detained in one of Assad's detention centers and they do not know his fate as of now:

My other nephew, my sister's son, he was detained in the Assad regime detention centers. Until now we do not know if he is dead, or still alive. Nonetheless, we pray that their spirit is in heaven, and may God spread mercy on those who are still suffering.

Civil wars and interstate conflicts are both violent and destructive. Their occurrences have long-lasting devastating outcomes. In the case of interstate conflict, antagonism and demonization of "the other" may continue in post-peace accord. However, the citizens of countries in conflict are not necessarily forced to attend the same public services and interact with each other on a daily basis. In the worst-case scenario, governments of hostile nations may cut or maintain very low diplomatic and trade relationships. In contrast, conflict counterparts in civil wars inevitably live in the same country and in the

same communities, and utilize the same public spaces and public services. Therefore, addressing the traumatic experiences of victims and their families, responding to individual and collective grievances, and restoring intergroup relationships are necessary in order to restore social peace and harmony (Deutsch, 2014, 48,49). Abu Houssam noted that the vicious civil war in Syria has caused deep trauma and hostility among the people:

Civil war is one of the most difficult wars; it is different than interstate wars... it is very hard to forget the wounds that it causes. I think time will provide recovery. No one has the resolution to what people have suffered in this war in Syria.

Civil wars tear societies apart. They break intergroup mutual trust and respect, and implant distrust and suspicion. Indeed, everyone suffers from conflict, which creates a shared social trauma. Nonetheless, some groups and individuals suffer comparatively more than others. As such, those who feel that they have incurred major losses may accept peace and reconciliation, but they may not trust its outcomes. Oum Hamam argued that those who have lost loved one's might not be able to reconcile with the perpetrators because the wounds are too raw:

In my opinion reconciliation and peace are the best option. However, I think people who lost family members might reject a potential peace accord with the regime. I, myself, my nephew, my brother's son was killed; the value of his life for me is more precious than the lives of all Alawites people. In my view, the lives of 100,000 Alawites do not equal the life of my nephew.

In terms of defining reconciliation and what it means to them, people define terms and concepts according to their socioeconomic positionality, gender, educational attainment, and personal experiences. Even academics and scholars who devote their careers to studying these concepts lack consensus when it comes to defining reconciliation. As such, I did not expect the study participants to provide definitions identical to one another. And while the twelve study participants each provided different definitions of

reconciliation, all nonetheless reflected their aspirations to end the conflict, restore social peace and harmony, end unlawful arbitrary practices, and enforce equality, inclusiveness, and the rule of law. For example, Oum Hanin argued that reconciliation meant a holistic process where people feel safe:

Reconciliation means a holistic reconciliation that covers everything. It does not mean the end of the war and continuation of all the unlawful practices. The war must end, but also the arbitrary arrests must end, and all people [must] enjoy safety. People need to feel secure and safe as before.

However, Kamal noted that reconciliation meant something deeper in that all parties must have empathy for the “other,” and make concessions in order to make peace:

Reconciliation means heart cleansing, and giving concessions with minimum boundaries that preserve one’s rights and dignity. It means finding common points and avoiding obstacles that may lead to conflict re-eruption.

On the other hand, Abu Sakker contended that reconciliation meant mutual respect, inclusiveness, and equality – all of which must be combined with retribution:

Reconciliation needs to be based on respect for all ethnic groups, giving a role to minorities without dismissing them and arguing with them, and enforcing equality before the law. Reconciliation will not take place without retribution. Individuals who committed crimes against Syrians must face fair trials.

Reconciliation meant different things to participants such as making concessions, having empathy and love for other people. Participants and their families have been victims of the ongoing conflict (collateral damage of the war). They lost close family members, and their homes, and with that their sense of security and tranquility.

6.3 - Conflict Transformation and Intergroup Peaceful Relationship Restoration- *“In Lebanon, the civil war continued for 15 years. But, they were able to reconcile and co-exist peacefully.” Abu Hassan*

As discussed in chapter four, all study participants asserted that all Syrians despite their ethnic and religious identities, and socioeconomic statuses lived, largely, in peace, solidarity and cooperation with each other at the individual and communal levels. Yet, that social stability and harmony, and intergroup peaceful co-existence collapsed within months from the beginning of the conflict, transforming the conflict into a violent sectarian war. For example, Abu Sakker claims that the state drove a sectarian wedge between all of the ethnoreligious groups living in Syria, and within the same groups and families. Therefore, reconciliation will be a tough act to sell to people who have suffered throughout the civil war:

Before 2011, we lived in peace, we used to call each other by first name, and refer to each other by name without using the ethnic and religious background for identification. But, the regime, created sectarianism and promoted it. The war destroyed the relationship of trust and interdependence between people. Now, Syrians are divided ethnically and politically. Within the same family, you will find a person against the regime, and another person for the regime.

One way in which protagonists exploited the ethnoreligious group's sectarian identity, and denied ordinary people their right to maintain a neutral position towards counterparts in the conflict was by forcing allegiances during the conflict, further polarizing the cultivated identity divide. Anti-Assad Sunnis who lived in Alawites majority regions had to denounce the uprising and endorse the Assad regime, and pro-Assad supporters living amongst Alawites and Shia, Christians, and even Sunnis had to endorse the uprising and denounce Assad publicly. In other words, the conflict divided Syrians at multiple levels. Abu Houssam, a Sunni dentist who lived in the Alawites majority [governorate B] reflected on this issue in the following way:

After the eruption of the protests, we had to take a clear position, either to support the regime, or support the opposition. The majority of Alawites were pro-Assad. We could not be vocal and express our opinions [among them]. We could not say what we believe. The regime called protesters terrorists, and claimed that they seized weapons from protesters. We had to close our mouths and remain silent. But, inside we were boiling. However, if you say a word, you would be arrested.

Broadly, the Syrian civil war is labeled in the international media as a sectarian conflict between the Alawites/Shia minority backed by Iran and Hezbollah, and the Sunni majority backed by Sunni autocracies in the Gulf Arab countries, namely, Saudi Arabia. However, in reality, the conflict also caused division between Sunnis and Christians, Kurds and Alawites, Kurds and Arab Sunnis, and within Arab Sunnis between moderate Sunnis and self-acclaimed Sunni extremists/terrorists. Moreover, as Hassan Talib noticed, division exists even between close family members and friends who belong to the same identity in-groups:

The conflict negatively affected the social bonds in society. People within the same family were divided into pro-regime and anti-regime. For example, if we were friends, and my brother was pro-regime, and your brother joined the Free Army [anti-Assad militant group], the conflict would have affected the social relationship between us. However, people who are wise enough, they were able to grasp the situation. Personally, I still have friends, who still support the regime, and friends who are anti-regime, and friends who were killed during the protests and war. People were divided into three groups, anti-Assad, pro Assad, and ordinary people who want just to live in peace and survive.

The sectarian nature of the conflict and how it further segregated people territorially escalated the negative effects of the war. For example, Oum Hanin stated that the destructive narratives of protagonists interrupted the long-lasting intergroup peaceful cohabitation and cooperation in Syria:

The war affected people negatively. We lost the sense of security. People lost trust of each other. As I told you, my region has Sunni and Shia towns, and as sectarianism and animosity between Sunnis and Shia emerged, Shias did not

feel safe to pass through Sunni majority regions and lands. Likewise, Sunnis did not feel safe to pass through Shia majority towns. There were many incidents where Shia militias kidnapped Sunnis and killed them. Likewise, Sunni militias kidnapped Alawites and killed them. That's how the situation deteriorated.

The concentration of Shia militias and Hezbollah militants in Alawites and Shia communities, and the aid of Assad's air force to relieve Alawites and Shia communities besieged by rebels exacerbated sectarianism and enforced the sectarian nature of Syria's civil war.

Intergroup tension exists also between the primary conflict counterparts (Assad's forces, and Sunni rebels), and other minority groups. Minority groups like Christians and Kurds chose a neutral stance at the beginning of the conflict. They neither endorsed the anti-Assad protests, nor aligned with the Assad regime. Kamal asserted that his majority Christian community had a formidable relationship with neighboring Sunni majority communities. However, the collective neutral stance of his community towards the uprising was misinterpreted and misrepresented as implicit support for the Assad regime. Consequently, rebel groups attacked his community:

Generally, Christians did not endorse the anti-Assad protests. I would say we remained neutral. Our position was interpreted as we are supporting the regime. Therefore, some Sunni militant groups attacked my [Christian] town. We were surprised that our neighboring towns whom we treated with respect as friends would strike us. They attacked our town because they believed that Christians are pro-Assad. People with wisdom and deep understanding did not believe that propaganda, but ordinary people believed that we are their enemies. The Free Army attacked my town and killed 20 people. They strike indiscriminately. Overall, Syrian Christians did not care about identity of people who rule Syria. We did not care who is ruling Syria, Sunnis or Alawites. Christians support the system that maintains stability in the country. As long as there is a central government, Syrian Christians will support that central government regardless of the religious identity of the leaders. We are pro central government that maintains stability and security.

Essentially, all study participants reported that the Syrian civil war has divided Syrians and destroyed the intergroup co-existence and social cohesion that had existed prior to the 2011 protests. With this context in mind, the follow-up questions that I asked participants were: is it possible to restore intergroup peaceful co-existence and cooperation that existed before 2011? And what should be done to achieve that goal?

Evidently, All participants asserted that repairing intergroup relationships and restoring the pre-2011 intergroup co-existence, mutual respect, interdependence and cooperation is possible, and must be central objectives of peacebuilding efforts. In fact, some participants argued that restoring intergroup peaceful co-habitation is a social reality and a geopolitical necessity in order to maintain the territorial integrity of the Syrian state and to build a durable peace. Abu Hassan attests to this sentiment in the following way:

In my hometown [...], one quarter are Alawites. Regardless of what happened, we are going to co-exist peacefully. We are one nation like a neighborhood that is formed by people from different backgrounds. Our differences do not deny that we are neighbors and share the same space.

All participants affirmed that it is possible to restore intergroup peaceful co-existence because the intergroup relationships between individuals at the grassroots level is still solid, and despite the conflict protagonists' exploitation of sectarianism, ordinary individuals still trust and rely on each other. For example, Abu Hassan shared his story about his military officer neighbor when he was leaving Syria, and how intergroup ordinary people in his community perceive what has happened in Syria as follows:

Right now, when Sunni and Alawites former neighbors meet somewhere in Hama, they both hug each other and cry. They are heartbroken for what has happened in Syria. There is no hatred or animosity between the members of both sects. In my opinion, there is no hatred. When I left my hometown with my family and moved to Turkey, I met an Alawites officer from my town in

one of the barracks. He saluted me and wished us a safe trip. He did not question me or inform on me. If all people were treated fairly and got their rights, we can co-exist peacefully. If they do not deprive people from their rights, we would live in peace.

Likewise, Kamal who opposed the uprising and expressed pro-Assad sentiments said that he still maintains relationships with individuals from other religious groups, including those who attacked his town and have anti-Assad feelings:

As I told you earlier, rebel groups in our neighboring towns attacked my town. I am still in contact with some of those people. Some of them repented and regret what they did. If I go back to Syria, I would contact them. Syrians who oppose the regime and those who are pro-regime regret that they might have contributed to the escalation of the conflict.

Nonetheless, all participants recognize that repairing the intergroup peaceful co-habitation; cooperation and solidarity will require a long time and an enormous amount of effort from all Syrians. Abu Hassan, for example, articulated that rebuilding trust and repairing relationships would take decades:

The war in Syria destroyed the country's physical infrastructure, its future potential, as well as its social bonds. Rebuilding Syria's infrastructure may take a decade. However, restoring the intergroup peaceful co-existence and social harmony will require several decades of intense efforts of community trust-building. As Syrians, we are against division and sectarianism. We are all Syrians, and we lived together. I worked in construction with Alawites Syrians from Wadi Loyoun, Loyoun Valley. We were co-workers and roommates. When my father passed away, they came to the worksite in a taxi to inform me that my father was sick in the hospital. They did not inform me that he was already dead. They supported me enormously like I am their brother. I will never forget their kindness. We cannot generalize. Not all Alawites are good or bad. The same thing applies to Sunnis. Not all Sunnis are good or bad.

Indeed, restoring intergroup co-existence will require time, extensive effort in the way of community trust-building, along with kindness, mutual respect, understanding, and positive reciprocity at the individual level. Oum Hanin stated that it would take many

decades before people can fully trust each other and interact with each other in an authentic way:

It is not easy to end the antagonism between people. That requires time. The best indication of peaceful co-existence between these groups is the nature of interaction between people at the individual level. If you are malevolent towards me, then I am going to be malevolent towards you. However, if I see that you are not causing any physical harm to me, I am going to reciprocate and do not harm you, and I would be kind and gentle towards you. Living without molestation and harassment will require a long time, not a short time.

Kamal shared the story of two families in his community that viciously attacked and counterattacked each other. The cycle of violence led to the death of several persons from both families. However, after 20 years, they were able to repair the relationship and even have interfamily marriages. Thus, he argued that similarly restoring intergroup peaceful co-existence in Syria would require between 20 to 30 years because people who have been harmed by others will always seek vendetta to avenge the slight or murder:

It is possible to reconcile and re-establish the pre-2011 intergroup peaceful co-existence, but that will require time and a lot of effort. It will require mostly time. We need at least one generation to go back to where we were. We will need between 20 and 30 years. For example, in my town in the 1980s, two young men fought fiercely over a woman; both loved her and were in competition. They fought with knives. It was a big mess. If we represent the two people as A and B, after the conflict, person A killed person's B brother who was a student in the medical school. As a result, a cousin of person B killed a cousin of person A. At least 6 people were killed from both sides because people there believe in vengeance. Afterwards, the government got involved and separated the two families. After 20 years, the two families reconciled and had interfamily marriages as if nothing had happened. This same scenario will happen in Syria, but that will take more than 20 years. Even if a peace agreement is signed and peace is restored, the country will go through a bloody transition period marked by violence because people believe in vengeance.

Ethnic and religious diversity is a shared characteristic amongst Syria's neighboring countries, especially Lebanon and Iraq. People in both countries have suffered from brutal protracted violent ethnopolitical conflicts. Despite seeing an end to both conflicts,

a few decades later, intergroup tension is still visible in both countries and at certain times that jeopardizes the continuity of the fragile peace in both countries. Iraq has almost an identical demographic structure as Syria (Kurds, Shia, Sunni, Christians, and Yazidis). After the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, the elites of the three main ethnoreligious groups in Iraq (Shia, Kurds, and Sunnis) agreed upon a political compromise to form a federal state system based on the demographic concentration of each group (Kurds in the North, Sunnis in the Center, and Shia in the South). Despite reaching this agreement, sectarianism and identity politics still dominate the political discourse, and intergroup/sectarian tension is still prominent, especially during elections. Abu Houssam argues that, similarly, the wounds of the Syrian civil war and the subsequent damaged intergroup relationships will be difficult to repair. Hence, he predicts that Syria will live under a fragile peace like its Eastern neighboring country Iraq for some time:

Syria is like a volcano. It could re-erupt at any time. As I told you earlier, the wounds that the conflict caused in Syria will require a long time to recover. In my opinion, the scenario that happened in Iraq will be repeated in Syria. The conflict will not end. In Iraq, every once and a while troubles re-occur. They have been living in this for 15 years. Since the US invasion in 2003, Iraq has been in conflict. I expect the same thing will happen in Syria. The civil war has affected people negatively. What happened in Syria is like a piece of glass that is shattered. It will be very difficult to repair it. It may remain unbroken, but it will remain damaged. That is what happened in Syria. There is a big crack that is difficult to repair.

In contrast, Abu Hassan, who spent several years in Lebanon as a migrant worker in post-1975 civil war, witnessed the physical destruction of that country and the intergroup damage it caused, as well as its peaceful restoration. Abu Hassan referenced Lebanon as a successful example of reconciliation and conflict transformation. He stated, “In Lebanon, the civil war continued for 15 years. But, they were able to reconcile and co-exist peacefully.”

When I asked participants how they want to contribute to reconciliation and repairing intergroup relationships, some said they intended to be engaged in their community to promote communication and mutual understanding; others said that the relationship would be repaired spontaneously over time and with acts of kindness. Others such as Majid suggested the organization of intergroup social activities to restore the social bond and mutual trust between groups:

For example, we can focus on holidays that matter to all of Syria's groups, and create and organize common gatherings that bring all groups together. These kinds of activities will increase amity between the groups. We should spread awareness about mutual respect and the particularity of each religious/ethnic group, and that all people are Syrian citizens. With God's will all these suggestions will be beneficial.

Some participants aspire to play leading roles in peace restoration by organizing seminars that promote peaceful co-existence and mutual respect, and mediating intergroup conflicts. Abu Riyad, for example, stated that he wishes to become a mediator in his community in Syria and be in a position of influence to intervene and transform interpersonal and intergroup conflicts:

For example, if there is vengeance between a Sunni family and a Shia, or Alawites family, I will do my best to play the role of a mediator to help them reach a compensation amount, or organize reconciliation seminars, or establish an organization that promotes goodness between both communities, and rebuild Syria.

Peacebuilding efforts in post-conflict Syria must include policies and initiatives that address Syrian victims' individual and collective traumatic experiences, and that respond to their needs to address the root causes of conflict while repairing intergroup mutual respect and understanding. Such policies must also restore intergroup trust, social solidarity, and cooperation.

6.4 - Syria's Possible Paths Towards Conflict Transformation

Reconciliation is the ultimate goal of new governments in transition to democracy from authoritarian regimes, and/or post-peace agreement. Therefore, one of the major decisions they must make relates to the adoption of transitional justice mechanism(s) to pursue reconciliation and respond to the needs of past victims of human rights violations and their families (Wanis-St. John, 2013, 362; Klinkner & Smith, 2015, 18). Historically, governments in the Global North and Global South alike either adopted retributive justice mechanisms, or non-retributive mechanisms such as truth-telling commissions, and restorative justice processes. However, some countries created a hybrid system of both (Tuso, 2013, 258). In a similar vein, most scholars, if not all, assert that retribution and individual accountability (retributive justice) are core concepts in the Western human rights paradigm, and relationship restoration, and harm repair (restorative justice) are core concepts in Indigenous worldviews. There is, however, less emphasis on the centrality of both forms of justice in other religions and cultures. For example, both retribution and forgiveness are core concepts in Arab-Islamic culture and beliefs – something that is underexplored by peacebuilders in such cultural contexts (Abu Nimer, 2013, 69-80)

In my interview questions, I did not ask participants specifically about transitional justice, traditional conflict resolution processes, or peace education. Instead, these themes emerged inductively after a thorough qualitative data analysis. Primarily, during the interviews, I asked participants to identify the required steps necessary to build sustainable peace in Syria and to restore the peaceful intergroup co-existence, as well as identify what constitutes a successful conflict transformative political environment. For

some participants, achieving reconciliation was equated with the prosecution of human rights perpetrators and reparation for their victims (retribution). For others, it was equated with non-retributive processes that stimulate healing, forgiveness, empowerment, inclusion, and transformation (see Klinkner & Smith, 2015, 10). For instance, Oum Hamam noted that the perpetrators who committed gross civil and human rights violations must be punished:

In my opinion, people who committed massacres must be punished to pay for the suffering and pain of Syrians. But I am sure God will punish them for what they have done. For example, my nephew was killed and left behind a wife and six children, his elderly parents, and a disabled old sister. He was the sole provider to them all. But, the Alawites killed him. What [compensation] would replace him? Nothing would replace him for his family members. I am his aunt, and no one would replace him to me. What about his [immediate] family?

Similarly, Abu Houssam stated that all predators responsible for killing and torturing noncombatants must be held accountable:

Individuals who are responsible for the killings, arrests and torture of Syrian people must face prosecution in fair trials. Personally, I believe in “Tit for Tat” justice. I am sure other people believe in the same concept. We should not tolerate predators who abuse their power; we should hold them responsible and give the victims their rights.

In contrast, Abu Hassan argued that reconciliation meant forgiveness and forgetting the past with its entire unpleasant traumatic memories in order to build a new life, and restore peace and stability:

Reconciliation means that we forget the past and open a new page. What has happened is beyond our control. We need to forget and forgive if we want to live in tranquility for the rest of our lives. Living in the past has no benefits whatsoever. It is better that we move on, instead of being stuck in the past and its losses.

However, Majd equated the success of reconciliation processes with regime change and the organization of free elections:

We will need regime change in order to guarantee the success of reconciliation. People lost so many family members during the war, these people need to witness the regime change in order to reconcile. Also, we will need the organization of free elections and the appointment of a new government that serves the interests of all Syrians despite their sectarian affiliation, or religion, or anything else. Those two elements are sufficient to establish reconciliation in Syria.

Participants are divided about adequate approach to transform the conflict and relationships in post-conflict Syria. Some participants are willing to forgive the past to build the future. However, other want the political system to be dismantled and the perpetrators held accountable for their crimes in order to be free to reconcile with their neighbors.

6.4.1 - Forgetting and Forgiveness As a Way Forward- *“We need to forget and forgive if we want to live in tranquility the rest of our lives. Living in the past has no benefits whatsoever.”* Abu Hassan.

Syrian people have incurred major losses in the course of the last seven years, and encountered several forms of hardship in their displacement journeys within zones of conflict in Syria, in the United Nations refugee camps, and living in host countries. First and foremost, Syrians lost a nation, their family members and friends, homes and properties, their ontological and economic security, and their pride, dignity, and self-worth due to the rise of anti-refugees sentiments in the host countries. Abu Houssam recognized that the wounds are deep and raw and the memories fresh and painful that will make it difficult to transform relationships and heal from the sectarian violence:

What happened in Syria caused a large wound that will be difficult to recover from. It will be difficult to restore the intergroup relationships and return to the status quo that was before 2011. The war has left very negative effects on all Syrians that would not be erased in a day or two. It is difficult to restore peace and peaceful co-existence in Syria. As I told you earlier, we had a small wound that caused the tension between Sunnis and Alawites. But what is happening right now in Syria since 2011 caused large wounds that are hard to

cure. Right now, there is antagonism, and a desire for vengeance. Lot of people lost family members in this conflict such as children and siblings. So, it is going to be a difficult process to restore peace.

Similarly, Abu Hassan noted the shared sense of loss amongst Syrians, but added that it comes alongside their desire to build a better future. He argued that such desires would incite their sense of forgiveness and forgetting the past with all its unpleasant memories, in order to move forward:

Everyone must reconcile. All people lost family members and their properties. My house was destroyed during an air strike, and I lost many young relatives ... we need to forget and forgive if we want to live in tranquility the rest of our lives. Living in the past has no benefits whatsoever. It is better that we move on, instead of being stuck in the past and its losses. Whatever happened is gone; it is part of the past. Deceased people are killed for no merits, people are killed from both side “anti-Assad, and pro-Assad”... What has happened is a part of history. So many people are killed. Everything in our town is destroyed and most people left.

Forgetting and forgiving seem to be prerequisites for restoring peaceful intergroup co-existence and building a durable post-accord peace. Abu Houssam noted that forgetting what happened in Syria in the last seven years is the best available strategy to restore peace and intergroup mutual existence:

I think the best thing to do to be able to accept one another and co-exist peacefully is to try to forget the entire troubles. How to forget the troubles? People should preoccupy themselves, and do not remember the past. We should change everything in order to help people forget the past. Everyone in society must take his full rights; everyone should do his best to preserve his rights without violating the rights of others. That is the most important thing. We should rebuild a society that values respecting other people’s rights, and eliminates antagonism and hatred, and promotes tolerance.

Likewise Hassan Talib argued that people must look forward and not into the country’s troubled past:

People need to forget the past in order to rebuild Syria; we will need to forget the whole past. If we want to live in peace, we better forget.

Indeed, participants endorsed forgetting the past and forgiving perpetrators. At the same time, they recognized that that does not mean necessarily that peaceful intergroup co-existence and social harmony will be restored instantly. They recognized that reconciliation is a complex process that requires time and an extensive effort from all conflicting parties for it to be successful. The participants who lost close family members endorsed the mitigation of lingering antagonisms by forgetting and forgiving. Oum Hanin lost two of her children at the hands of pro-Assad Shia militants. Nonetheless, she states that she does not have ill feelings towards members of her neighboring Shia community. Instead, she prays that God punishes those who caused her the loss of her children. This is what she had to say on the issue:

All residents' in my neighboring town [name of town] are Shia. I have a son, he was 19 years old when he got killed. Our region is a farmland. My son was informed that the Shia militants in the neighboring community kidnapped his friend. My son went to that community to release his friend. But a sniper shot him. You know, even though Shia people in that community killed my son, I do not have hatred towards all people in that community. Two of my sons were killed because of that Shia community. Both were young; one was single, and the other one was married and had one daughter. Nonetheless, I do not have malevolence towards them. I do not hate them all even though they killed my sons. People in that community caused the deaths of children and elderly people ... Personally; I do not have antagonism against the people of that community. May God punish mainly those who killed my sons. God still exists, and He will judge everyone.

As discussed above, according to international human rights organizations, pro-Assad forces have systematically committed human rights atrocities. Nonetheless, regardless of this condemnation by the international community, some participants state that they are willing to accept the possibility of granting Assad and the leadership of his regime impunity if he agrees to step down and leave Syria. For example, Abu Houssam noted that the Syrian people would welcome the departure of Assad into political asylum:

Syrians will not demand the prosecution of Assad if he agrees to leave Syria and seeks asylum in another country. But, I do not think he would step down and leave, because he could have done that from the beginning, but he chose not to do so.

Similarly, Majd articulated that it was important for all members of the regime to go into political exile in order for people to have some kind of closure:

In the beginning of the conflict people demanded the step down of the regime, but after the occurrence of all the atrocities during the war, people would demand the prosecution of the regime's leadership. However, I personally prefer just to get rid of this regime and let them go to their preferred destination for exile. But people who lost family members will demand the prosecution of the regime.

Forgiveness and forgetting the dark human rights violations of the past are crucial elements in the reconciliation process. Nonetheless, such a process needs to include also various forms of reparation to victims and their families. Monetary reparation will never adequately compensate victims for their losses; however, it is important in erasing, or at least, easing their daily obstacles, and reducing their collective grievances. For example, Oum Hamam articulated that Syrian women really suffered during the war when their spouses, the main breadwinners in the families, were murdered and need to be compensated for their losses:

Syrian women lost their children and husbands. What can they do? Nothing will replace our losses. May God help us. If peace is restored in Syria, Syrian women must be entitled to a monthly salary to support them. Women who lost their husbands require financial aid to support their children. Likewise, women who lost their children must be entitled to a salary to help them live a proper life with dignity. This is what I hope for.

In addition, forgiveness and forgetting do not mean absolute impunity for perpetrators of grave human rights violations. Majd highlights the importance of forgetting and forgiving for healing. Nonetheless, he also stresses the need to prosecute the Assad leadership regime that has been involved in committing atrocities in Syria:

I think we should learn to forgive and forget as a whole nation in order to heal and reunite. Nonetheless, we need to hold those who committed massacres accountable. We cannot punish everyone; otherwise, we are going to have another war. If peace is restored, and the regime changes, it would be better to tolerate and purify our hearts from hatred and vengeance. They need to end sectarianism and have the Syrian citizenship as a standard, not the ethnic and religious identity. All citizens should be equal before the law in rights and obligations without discrimination. If they do not prefer one group over other groups, everything will go in the right direction and we will have peace.

All participants discussed “Syria’s future” either directly, or indirectly in their responses to justify why they support retribution, or forgiveness. Those who endorse forgetting and forgiveness stress that pursuing that approach is the best alternative to build a better future in Syria. Likewise, those who support the prosecution of gross human rights violations, or forcing them into political exile believe that retribution is a requirement to build a sustainable peace, and a just society.

6.4.2 - Retributive Transitional Justice- *“To restore peace in Syria, and give tranquility to people, we need retribution.” Abu Sakker.*

Participants highlighted the necessity of prosecuting perpetrators of human rights atrocities as a required policy post-peace accord in order to serve justice, give closure to victims and their families, and thereby, build the basis for sustainable peace. They also claimed it will help restore social stability and facilitate the acceptance of conflict resolution. Abu Houssam commented that the Alawites elites who planned and carried out the massacres and torture of noncombatants must be tried in courts of law:

It is possible to restore peace and peaceful co-existence, but it would be hard. Nothing is impossible, but it is possible with one condition: the power must be taken from the Alawites elites who are responsible for the killing of Syrians and destruction of Syria. Those responsible for the killing, torture and suffering of Syrians must face fair trials. If that happened, there will be the possibility to co-exist peacefully with Alawites. That is justice. That is what constitutes justice.

Likewise, Abu Sakker considered the prosecution of individuals who committed human rights violations as a prerequisite to sustain postaccord peace and guarantee the public's support of potential societal conflict transformation:

We lived for a thousand years in Syria. We had Alawites, Christians, Yazidis, and Sunnis, but we co-existed in peace. To restore peace in Syria, and give tranquility to people who suffered individually and collectively in this conflict, we need retribution. We need to put criminals on trial. Grudges, hatred, and the desire for revenge will remain in peoples' hearts, but if people witness retribution, they might feel peace. People will not forget, but they will try to forget.

Similarly, Hana noted that all the criminals responsible for the carnage must be prosecuted because the people would demand retribution:

If Assad steps down, he must be prosecuted in court. All criminals must be prosecuted. For example, do burglars face prosecution for their crimes? Yes, they do. When a criminal commits a crime, they prosecute him for what he did. Assad has done horrible things that will never be forgotten. He caused a big wound in our hearts that we will not be able to forget. If peace is restored and Syria is rebuilt, if you enter to any house you will [still] find sadness and tragedies. There is no house in Syria that did not experience tragedies and have big wounds. For example, my sister lost her leg [and] my neighbor lost two young men. How could you forget those young people in the age of the flowers that you worked hard to raise? But suddenly, death takes them away with the hands of the president forces and terrorist groups.

Likewise, Oum Hanin stated that social justice demands that the powerful leaders of the regime and all those responsible for committing crimes against humanity be prosecuted:

Those who committed crimes must face a fair trial for what they have done. Those who killed and destroyed must be killed or forced into exile. Some people say it will be risky to prosecute the powerful leaders in the regime. But, if we do not prosecute them, then we will set a bad example for justice. We will not prosecute everyone. We need to prosecute primarily the top leadership that has decided to drive us to where we are at right now.

Historically, since WWII, the UN Security Council has established numerous *ad hoc* courts to investigate human rights atrocities in violence-torn societies. Such a possibility still exists even with the establishment of an International Criminal Court. The

horrific human rights atrocities that have been committed by the warring parties in Syria since the eruption of anti-Assad protests in March 2011 are crimes against humanity, genocide, and war crimes. Therefore, they are within the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court. Article 5 (1) of Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court states, “the jurisdiction of the Court shall be limited to the most serious crimes of concern to the international community as a whole. The Court has jurisdiction in accordance with this Statute with respect to the following crimes: (a) The crime of genocide; (b) Crimes against humanity; (c) War crimes; (d) The crime of aggression” (Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, 1998).

However, initiating the investigation about the crimes stated in Article five of the Rome Statute of the ICC requires three conditions presented in article 13 of the Statute:

The Court may exercise its jurisdiction with respect to a crime referred to in article 5 in accordance with the provisions of this Statute if: (a) A situation in which one or more of such crimes appears to have been committed is referred to the Prosecutor by a State Party in accordance with article 14; (b) A situation in which one or more of such crimes appears to have been committed is referred to the Prosecutor by the Security Council acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations; or (c) The Prosecutor has initiated an investigation in respect of such a crime in accordance with article 15.

Yet, given the ongoing rivalry between the United States and Russia supported by China, the UN Security Council has not been able to deliver on its responsibilities to maintain global peace and security. Russia has repeatedly used its veto power in favor of the Assad regime, which turned the UN Security Council into a deadlocked institution. Simon Adams, director of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, states, "Syrians are paying with their lives for the Council's inability to agree on how to end mass atrocities there" (Aljazeera, 2015).

Therefore, on December 19, 2016, the U.N. General Assembly passed a Resolution to establish an, “International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011” (U.N. General Assembly, 2016). The resolution bypassed the deadlock of the U.N. Security Council, sent victims a glimmer of hope that justice is possible even within the complex structure of the U.N., and it sent a warning sign to the perpetrators that they will be punished sooner or later for their crimes.

The resolution called upon states to end impunity for human rights atrocities committed in Syria since March 2011, encouraged the U.N. Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court, encouraged states to investigate and prosecute within their jurisdictions for war crimes committed in Syria, and encouraged the conflict parties to resume peaceful peace talks (U.N. General Assembly, 2016).

Khaled discussed the possibility of establishing an international court with the mandate to investigate human rights violations since the eruption of anti-government protests in 2011:

Those who committed massacres must be held responsible. They must be prosecuted and face fair trials in courts. They need to establish an international court to prosecute them.

The study participants demanded retributive justice as a requirement to build a sustainable post- peace accord society. However, they highlighted unanimously the concept of individual accountability. They recognized the fact that just because Assad regime leaders are members of the Alawites sect does not translate into policies that then permits the exclusion and punishment of all members of the Alawites community. For

example, Abu Sakker stated that not all Alawites citizens are guilty of any crimes, and some of them have supported the revolution; yet there is less emphasis on their voices:

Ordinary Syrian citizens do not see all Alawites as guilty of what happened. The leadership of Alawites and the elites of Alawites supported the regime, but ordinary Alawites all over Syria want peace. In fact, some Alawites support the revolution. I personally had many Alawites friends. We need retribution in order to rebuild national unity and flip the page.

Likewise, Abu Hassan recognized that it was important that the Alawites are not stereotyped as causing the war when they and their families have equally suffered:

...If the Alawites are 2 million in Syria, only 100,000 individuals control the country, and the rest of them are deprived and poor. In my town, there are very poor Alawites people. Their children are not in the military. We should not generalize and put all Alawites in one basket. Ordinary Alawites people suffered as well in this war. They were forced to leave their communities, their kids were killed, and their homes are destroyed ... in my hometown, there were 8 thousand Sunni residents and 4 thousand Alawites. Almost the whole town is empty. Almost all the 8 thousand Sunnis left the town and resettled in other regions in the province of Hama. Likewise, all the Alawites left. Right now, when a Sunni and an Alawites former neighbors meet somewhere in Hama, they both hug each other and cry. They are heartbroken for what has happened in Syria.

The prosecution of human rights atrocities post-peace accord is not an easy or straightforward task. It is a lengthy complex process that requires commitment and adequate resources. In fact, in some cases the prosecution of powerful conflict protagonists jeopardized the peacebuilding process. In other cases, it seemed unpractical due to the large number of perpetrators. Hassan Talib discussed this idea in the following manner:

Holding people accountable is a huge issue. If you will hold everyone accountable, you will need years to prosecute everyone. You will have an endless cycle, as people will be naming other people. That might lead to conflict re-eruption. Look at what happened in Lebanon, when the international investigator of the death of Rafik Lhariri, investigated high-ranking officials in Hezbollah. Hezbollah escalated and threatened the discontinuity of peace in Lebanon.

Participants made a clear distinction between Alawites people as a sectarian group, and the elites of the group. Therefore, supporters of retribution highlighted individual accountability in their responses. Thus, they demanded the prosecution of the Alawites leadership guilty of atrocities must be punished by the state's legal system, and reject the exclusion of Alawites as a whole group.

6.4.3 - Traditional Conflict Resolution Processes- *“Community leaders, the elders from all groups must play a role in the peace process.” Abu Hassan*

Critical emancipatory theorists and peace practitioners place great emphasis on the vital role of local knowledge and engagement in peacemaking efforts. For instance, local actors are considered, “the primary architects, owners and long term stakeholders’ of peace, and that peace must be produced and reproduced by the people living in a specific post-conflict context” (Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015, 826).

Non-western societies have their own systems of social organization and conflict resolution strategies and mechanisms that reflect their own cultural and religious beliefs. For example, Abu Nimer (1996a, 47-50) studied Western and traditional Middle Eastern conflict resolution processes that were used to resolve two intercommunal conflicts, using a case study from a Western context (Cleveland, Ohio) that involved interracial conflict between some members of the African American community, and white/Caucasians members of the same community, and another case study from the Middle East that involved Druze and Christian as conflict counterparts, and local Muslim leaders as mediators in a community in Israel. He concluded that the two conflict resolution approaches differed substantially in terms of processes, third party intervention, status

and incentive of the third party, and settlement objectives. Therefore, he asserts that "an initial comparison between Western and Middle Eastern conflict resolution approaches indicates that there is no basis for implementing or applying Western strategies in an Arab-Islamic context without adjusting and redefining such processes according to local experience" (Abu Nimer, 1996b, 27; see also Tusso, 2013, 260). Subsequently, Abu Nimer argues that the failure of Western interventions to consider the cultural and religious nuances of Middle Eastern societies explains the stagnation, and even the failure of peace processes in Iraq, Libya, Yemen and Syria, which thereby, stimulates sentiments of antagonism and skepticism towards Western peacebuilding interventions (Abu Nimer, 1996b, 34; Abu Nimer, 2013, 67).

Abu Nimer's (1996b) article, "Conflict Resolution In An Islamic Context: Some Conceptual Questions," discusses the adopted conflict resolution mechanisms in the Middle Eastern cultural context – namely, negotiation, (*Mufawadat*), arbitration (*Tahkim*), and conciliation (*Sulha*) – and urges peace interveners to study and understand the local inherited cultural and religious fabric. He stated:

Regardless of the selected intervention objective, a basic assumption must be adopted by those who seek to intervene in any non-Western context. Scholars and practitioners should be aware of, investigate, and understand the existing procedures of conflict resolution, which have been implemented in the local community. In the Middle East, adopting such a perspective means the acceptance and recognition of the proposition that Islam and Islamic societies contain beliefs, customs, attitudes, and a history, which can serve as rich bases for identifying constructive conflict resolution frameworks and processes (24).

One of the primary questions I asked the study participants was how they want to contribute to the peacebuilding and reconciliation processes in their communities in post-peace accord. Most participants discussed the importance of

community trust-building and conflict resolution. However, they mainly allocated that task to local communal leaders and elders. For instance, Abu Houssam said that the *Sheikhs*³, elders, are equipped to resolve intergroup and intragroups' conflicts in local communities:

I do not think that I have the skills to play a role in intergroup communication and trust-building. Usually, community leaders called "Sheikhs" play that role.

Local community leaders, *Sheikhs*, in rural and semi-rural regions in Syria and other Middle Eastern countries use arbitration (*Tahkim*) and conciliation (*Sulha*) to resolve intragroup and intergroup conflicts. Consequently, they have played a vital role in sustaining social stability and peaceful intergroup co-existence in their communities for decades. Abu Hassan discussed the peacemaking role of local leaders (*Sheikhs*) in his community in the [governorate C] before the eruption of anti-Assad protests and during intergroup tensions in the early days of conflict:

Every group/sect has a local leader, Sheikh, who plays the role of a mediator and guarantor during conflict between the members of the same group/sect, and between people who are from different sects. For example, in our community, we had Sheikh Mohamed. He used to act as a mediator and guarantor. He was well respected in the community. Everyone respected his decisions. Before, the troubles, the Sheikh solved all local conflicts. We had Sheikh Omar and Sheikh Ali, may God bless their souls. They were effective mediators and guarantors; everyone adhered to their resolutions. Unfortunately, they were killed during the troubles.

Additionally, Abu Hassan claimed that the *Sheikhs* would also play an instrumental role in conciliation (*Sulha*) in post-peace accord Syria:

It does not matter who are the parties of the conflict, or their identities, the Sheikh solves the conflict, and both parties reconcile as if the conflict never existed. We had what we call "Sulha". We want to go back to the status quo that we were living in before the eruption of the protests. If the war ends,

³ The word Sheikh in this context does not mean Ullema, Muslim religious scholars, but it means community elders.

Sheikhs can repair the damaged intergroup relationship and restore trust and cooperation. As I told you earlier, my neighbor is Alawites; I used to borrow his tractor to farm my land, and sold my crops to Alawites, Shia.

Elders in collective societies play vital roles in society as a source of knowledge and wisdom, and are active peacemakers within and between families and communities. Khaled claimed that elders are still highly respected in their families and communities and therefore, their peacemaking role is crucial in peacebuilding processes post-conflict.

This is what he had to say on the issue:

All Syrians lost family members, so, if they think rationally, they would choose reconciliation and peaceful co-existence. If you spread awareness amongst people, they will listen. In Syria, we still have respect for elders. In Syria, if you have a conflict in the family, you look for the eldest in the family who has wisdom and [is] respected. Elders from both sides of conflict talk, and eventually they reach a resolution and make conflict counterparts reconcile.

The source of authority and respect for *Sheikhs* in their communities originate from local people, not from the state. Their resolutions are more likely to be accepted and adhered to because outsiders do not impose them and they are not viewed with the same skepticism as the state is. Further, Abu Hassan articulated that they are deeply invested in the health and success of the community they serve:

A Sheikh's words are respected. If a Sheikh takes a decision, he has the power to implement it. If there is a troublemaker who causes hardship to someone, the Sheikh can arrest the fugitive and beat him up. The Sheikhs do not get their authority from the state. Their authority comes from the local people... When the Sheikh delivers a speech or says a word during a ceremony like a funeral, all people listen closely, and adhere to what he says.

The role of local leaders is vital because they have the ability to communicate directly with their community members, listen to them, and respond to their concerns and reservations. Further, the involvement of local leaders in the peace and reconciliation processes is more likely to be approved and followed by members of the community.

Abu Hassan argued that the *Sheikhs* must be permitted to lead the process forward so that people will follow them into the new Syria:

We need the leadership of each sect to take control of the process. That is it. As I told you earlier, each community has a Sheikh, a community leader. The wise leaders of each group must be in charge and lead the coming period. If the leadership becomes united and agreed on common issues, most likely people will follow.

Therefore, peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts in Syria need to start at the leadership level amongst communal intergroup local leaders. If communal intergroup leaders believe in peacebuilding and reconciliation, endorse it, and are committed to play a leading role in its processes; then it is more likely that the average ordinary Syrian citizen would follow. Abu Houssam noted that the wise community elders from all ethnoreligious groups are central to any peacebuilding and reconciliation process in a new Syria:

In my view, the practical steps to eliminate intergroup antagonism and hatred, and promote tolerance start with organizing meetings between the wise community leaders from both sides of the conflict to enable each party to explain its points of views, clarify right from wrong, admit wrongdoing that happened, and in the end, the parties that committed wrongdoing must compensate others and give them their rights. The rights must return to people who faced injustice, and all parties reconcile and accept one another. That's it. God is the most generous. The person who committed injustice against others, the perpetrator, must compensate the victim. In my view that's what would lead to hearts cleansing.

Syria is a modern society; meanwhile, it has its own distinctive identity that reflects its ethno-religious diversity, its culture, and history. Syria has its own conflict transformation and peacebuilding processes that must be from and central in any future post-peace accord society. Respected elders are central to those processes.

6.4.4 - Peace Education- *“I believe that schools are the key to avoiding a future conflict. Schools teach concepts such as mutual respect.” Kamal.*

Generally, educational systems reflect the dominant ideologies and power balance in any given society. Autocratic regimes create educational systems that promote submission and forbid the questioning or critique of authority figures. Abu Houssam argued that the educational system in Syria reflects the authoritarian nature of the Assad regime. Therefore, he proposed much needed educational reform as a required step to build peaceful society post-peace accord:

I think we need to reform the education system, and review the content we teach in schools. I still remember, from elementary school until high school and university, we had to study a course about nationalism and Arab nationalism. In that course they implant in the students' heads the glorification of the leader and Arab nationalism. They wanted us to glorify the leader, his statements and his deeds. We had to memorize everything about him and pass an exam. In my view, that was some sort of brainwashing. We go to schools to learn things that are beneficial in life like math, sciences, and physics. That course of nationalism and Arab nationalism was a major course in the curriculum. If you do not get a good grade in it, you will not pass to the next grade. In my opinion, the education system is politicized. It does not aim to provide knowledge to students. It has a destructive content to the brain.

President Hafez Assad used the media and educational system to consolidate his rule. The media and education system glorified the public image of President Assad as the nation's father and savior, and put a great deal of emphasis on Arab nationalism and secularization to create a new generation of Syrians that would be disconnected from their religious/sectarian backgrounds. Abu Houssam echoed that the education system under Assad regime was politicized, pointing to a general awareness about that fact:

In my opinion, the content of courses should not be politicized. I believe that the content of the “Nationalism and Arab Nationalism” course was distorted. They taught us things that are mysterious and unreal. We had a course on military training called “Fotowa”, but we had fewer courses in sports. They taught us content that makes the brain stagnate. They implemented fear in the

brains of students. We had to memorize the mottoes of the supreme leader even though you dislike him and disapprove of his sayings. The education system was a dictatorial system, not an educational system.

In its place, Abu Houssam proposed reforming schools' curriculums by teaching social studies and philosophy courses that teach students about human rights and social issues. Also, he suggested teaching students about Islamic and Christian religious concepts that preach tolerance, conciliation, and reconciliation:

Courses like social studies and philosophy could promote the goals of peacebuilding because they teach ideas about society and human rights. I think these two subjects would help in promoting peace. Also religious studies like Islamic Studies promote tolerance, but the content of Islamic Studies under the Assad regime is very narrow, and the chapters of the books are not precisely well chosen. Also, we have the course of Christian Studies. I think the content of the Islamic Studies and Christian Studies will help students understand ideas about tolerance and reconciliation. These two courses plus Social Studies and philosophy will play an important role in promoting tolerance and reconciliation.

Similarly, Kamal who explicitly expressed his support for the Assad regime, nonetheless demanded the reformation of the education system in Syria post-peace accord:

To reestablish peaceful co-existence, we need to enact laws that criminalize sectarianism, discrimination and corruption. Schools and educations system must promote peace and tolerance, organize social activities and sport events that bring people from different groups together, organize festivals and cultural activities that help people forget the past and enjoy their life. If people are well educated and act in accordance with what they learn in schools, society will be in peace and have respect for all people.

The success or the failure of reconciliation and conflict transformation processes relies on the role of formal educational system, because teachers tend to have a greater influence on students' learning abilities and world perceptions. Kamal added that the curriculum in schools is central to building a respectful and tolerant society:

I believe that schools are the key to avoid future conflict. Schools teach concepts such as mutual respect, compassion, open mindedness, and protecting the environment. Right now, I notice that my children are affected

a lot by their teachers. Schools have a greater effect on children than their parents. Right now, when I ask my children to do or not do certain things, they say, the teacher taught us not to do that. They are the ones who correct me sometimes now.

The role of teachers in promoting understanding and acceptance cannot be overstated. Unless teachers believe in the content they teach students, the outcomes of peace education would be minimal. Majd, as a teacher from [governorate G] in Eastern Syria, believed that if the education system had endorsed concepts that relate to social justice and equality, the conflict would not have erupted in the first place:

As a teacher, I will contribute to teaching children to love justice and equality, and human rights. If we had equality and justice in Syria, we would not have had today's conflict in Syria.

Majd's quote addresses one of the structural root causes of the conflict, namely the need to invest in young children for the future. Similarly, Kamal articulated that it is critical to empower young Syrian youth, tomorrow's future leaders, to take leadership positions in society:

People will need time to reconcile. Therefore, we need to invest in the young children to restore peace. Old people are not important anymore. Our future is in the hands of the children, and eventually, the old people will die and we will have a new generation that did not pollute its hands in this bloody war. I will focus on the new generation, the children. I will contribute to build a new social context for the children to avoid the recurrence of the conflict, support educational reform, support national unity and [ensure] that all Syrians are Syrian citizens regardless of their religion or ethnicity, and that they are all partners and share ownership of Syria.

Formal education advances students' knowledge as learning skills, and their humane qualities and social skills. Also, it has a significant impact on their perception of the world, and what is right, or wrong. Thus, investing in the pluralist education of Syrian youth will contribute to the development of a just, inclusive, and tolerant new Syria.

6.9 - Key Findings

A key finding in this study is that despite the damage that the war has caused, and the losses and hardships that Syrians have incurred in the course of the last seven years, all participants still firmly believe in the possibility of transforming the conflict, and restoring the social peace that existed before 2011. But, they recognized that achieving that goal will require time, extensive effort from all Syrians, and a multilevel peacebuilding approach that addresses the root causes of the conflict and its devastating outcomes such as human rights abuses, the destruction of intergroup relationships, and the specific needs of victims of the war. As Abu Hassan noted, the ongoing civil war has destroyed Syria's infrastructure, its future potentials, and intergroup social bonds. According to him, it will take a decade to rebuild the country's infrastructure; however, it will take decades to repair the damaged intergroup relations. More specifically, it will take between 20 and 30 years to restore the intergroup peaceful co-habitation and cooperation that existed in Syria before 2011 as Kamal noted.

The participants' approaches to transform the conflict and people's relationships, and build sustainable peace are different. Some emphasize the need for prosecuting the perpetrators of human rights (retribution), regime change, and/or forcing perpetrators into exile in exchange for impunity. Other participants call for forgetting the past, and forgiving the perpetrators and providing reparation for the victims in order for them to build a peaceful future.

Since 2011, all the warring parties have committed proportionally severe human rights violations against Syrian civilians such as indiscriminate attack, arbitrary arrest, torture, unlawful execution, enslavement and sexual exploitation of minorities, besiege of

civilians, and use of chemical weapons. Therefore, future peace accord in Syria must include reconciliation as one of its main objectives. The question here is, what would be the transitional justice mechanism that fits Syria, gets the approval of Syrian people, and does not jeopardize the peace process? The twelve participants in this study are divided about this topic. Some call for prosecution of perpetrators, retribution, and others call for forgiveness, and reparation for victims and their families. Unfortunately, the sample size is not large enough to generalize. Nonetheless, it might be short sighted to conclude that a hybrid system of transitional justice might work for Syria. Prosecuting the Assad regime leadership and other powerful warlords might be less practical; in fact, it might jeopardize the sustainability of peace. Thus, the more feasible option is the formation of truth-telling commission with a mandate to investigate all alleged human rights violations. The final report of a future truth-telling commission should have a legal abiding authority to future government, not mere recommendations. The Syrian state in post-conflict has to abide by the findings and recommendations of the commission's final report, and provide monetary reparation to victims and their families, and create legal and institutions framework to protect the human rights of all Syrians. Further, in post-conflict, the future parliament should enact a political exclusion Act (*al-Azl al-Siyasi*), which would ban convicted perpetrators from the political participation or holding any position in the state's apparatuses. The political exclusion might provide closure to victims and their families, and create the opportunity for the emergence of a new political elite, bureaucracy, military and law enforcement that did not pollute its hands with crimes during the civil war. The political exclusion is more likely to be perceived positively by

Syrians. Nonetheless, it might face resistance, and even lead to counter movement as happened in Libya in post Qaddafi (Lacher, 2013, 12).

A key finding in regards to addressing the human right violations that have resulted from the conflict, all participants' approaches reflect pragmatism/realism. Participants who demanded prosecution of perpetrators believe that such approach is a prerequisite for the sustainability of peace because it will provide closure to victims and their families to prevent future vengeance acts. Likewise, participants who demanded forgetting the past and forgiving chose that approach because they believe that prosecuting all perpetrators is not practical, and might jeopardize the peace process. The positions of both groups reflect a great level of awareness, as well as a determination to restore peace and avoid conflict re-eruption. That means ordinary Syrians put the country's interests above their personal interests, and sectarian and loyalties. Therefore, they will be shield for peacebuilding efforts success.

Further, a key finding in this study is that despite the manipulation of sectarian politics, and the promotion of intergroup intolerance especially between Alawites and Shia as a group, and Sunnis, individuals at the grassroots from both groups still maintain communication and dialogue. For example, Kamal and Hassan Talib noted that they still maintain communication with both anti-Assad and pro-Assad fellow Syrians via Internet and phone. Communication at the grassroots is essential in the peacebuilding and reconciliation process. Unless individuals open up a space for constant dialogue to define the conflict issues, as well as search for common ground so that they can work collectively for alternatives and become active agents/daily peacemakers to the extent

that makes them feel as if they own the process itself, the peace process will be less likely to harvest all of the peacebuilding dividends.

Despite the regime's intergroup manipulation of the various group's sectarian identities, individuals at the grassroots level still believe in unity and intergroup peaceful cohabitation. As Abu Hassan noted, when former Alawites, and Sunni neighbours meet outside their community, they embrace each other and condemn the devastating outcomes of the conflict. Therefore, even my research participants who endorse retribution, and regime change, emphasized the need to persecute the Alawites elites that assume leadership positions in the Assad regime, but not the Alawites as a whole ethnoreligious group. Thus, the key finding here is that the study participants do not call for the exclusion of all Alawites people in a post-peace accord if a potential peace agreement leads to regime change, or if the rebels prevail against the Assad regime. In fact, as illustrated in chapter five, all participants emphasize the need for building a just, and inclusive society that preserves the rights of all Syrian citizens. This finding indicates the awareness of the Syrian interviewees, their tolerance, and sincere pursuit of inclusiveness, and validates their true perception of intergroup peaceful co-existence that was before 2011. This pre-existing spirit that is shared by most Syrians ensures that conflict transformation processes have pre-conditions for successes if adequate resources and planning are put in place.

Another key finding in this study is the political position of ordinary Syrians about the conflict parties is not necessarily based on sectarian identity. In the international media, the conflict is portrayed as a sectarian conflict, meaning that all Sunnis are anti-Assad, and all Alawites, and Shia are pro-Assad. However, in reality, as

noted by Hassan Talib, and Abu Hassan, the conflict has caused intra-groups divisions, meaning that there are also Sunnis who are pro-Assad. Similarly, members of other groups like Christians, Druze, and Kurds are subjected to the same intra-group divisions (anti-Assad, and pro-Assad). Therefore, the general assessment, or binary division/dialectic of the conflict parties into pro-Assad and anti-Assad is artificial, and undermines the possibility of ending the conflict and restoring peace because it dismisses the role of the moderates/nonviolent intra groups' members of all ethnoreligious groups. The Alawites minority group should not be summed up as supporting the Assad family, and Sunni led militant groups should not be summed up as radical-terrorist organizations such as ISIS and Jabhat Al-Nusra. Further, the Sunni led rebels neither share the same ideological beliefs, nor the same vision for Syria's future. Those groups are classified as secular groups with a vision of a civic-secular state, Islamist moderate groups that envision a state that combines Islamic principles with modern civic state structures, and radical Islamist groups that envision a state that is based on a deviated/backward, unorthodox, understanding of Islam and its principles.

Furthermore, some participants addressed what I call the "structural elements of conflict transformation," which includes grassroots community-trust building through communal conflict resolution, and reform of the education system to repair intergroup relationships and build a long-lasting peace in post peace accord Syria.

Most of the study participants declared their intention to return to Syria to their habitual regions of residence once the war ends, and peace and safety are restored. Therefore, Syrians refugees who lived in Syria in mixed communities and neighborhoods, as well as those who lived in ingroup majority areas inevitably are going

to interact with outgroups' members, and attend the same public services. Individuals might have psychological barriers; especially those who incurred great losses during the conflict. As Khaled noted, individuals who lost most of their family members will have hardship adjusting to the post-conflict life. Therefore, future peacebuilding efforts must include workshops, seminars, and organization of social activities that foster contact and intergroup mutual understanding, trust-building, and mutual respect, and also helps individuals to heal. As Majd and Kamal noted, in post-conflict Syria there will be a need for organizing social events that make people forget about the horrors of the war and restore intergroup trust, and peaceful co-habitation. Those projects are pivotal for the success of the peacebuilding process.

Nonetheless, that success is less feasible without meaningful participation from individuals at the grassroots level. Individuals are either peacemaking agents, or peace wreckers. As Oum Hamam and Oum Hanin noted, acts of kindness, respect, and non-interference in outgroups' affairs will have a "reciprocal effect" and therefore, will create the basis for the peacebuilding and reconciliation processes. Essentially, conflict protagonists sign peace accords. Yet individuals at the grassroots level determine the fate of the accord. If individuals do not believe in peace, intergroup tension will persist and take the form of violence.

Syria is a moderate state, nonetheless, its people still adhere to communal traditions and rituals especially in rural regions. When I asked the participants how do they want to contribute to the reconciliation process, most of them allocated that role to *Sheikhs* or community elders, emphasizing the instrumental role that they have played in Syria's history; in particular, solving intergroup and intra group conflicts. As noted by

Abu Hassan, the source of the *Sheikhs* authority is communal, and it is not an extension of the state's authority. *Sheikhs* have acted as judges/mediators to solve intragroup and intergroup disputes; their social statuses establishes their legitimacy and credibility, and thus, their judgments and words are respected. Therefore, their role in the reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts is significant because they have social credibility. Their role is even more important given that the political elites are less popular, and might lack experience, legitimacy, and even worse, they may become opportunists and further promote sectarianism as is the case now in Iraq and Lebanon.

The participants' in-depth conflict analysis focused also on the education system in Syria, and its pivotal role in conflict transformation in post-conflict society. As Khaled, and Abu Riyad, (high school students before 2011), as well as Kamal noted, before the 2011 uprising, schools curriculum's and teachers did not embrace sectarianism, or conflicting religious narratives. In fact, students were not aware of sectarianism, or what it means being a Christian, Druze, Alawite, Shia, or Sunni. Further, students were not aware about the religious/sectarian identity of their teachers before the conflict. Also, no one took interest in investigating, or exploring other peoples' identities to set preferential treatment based on one's identity. Therefore, the participants' narratives set Syria up as an exception compared to other divided societies where dominant group(s) used the education system as a tool to foster distorted narratives. Nonetheless, Abu Houssam contested that the education system before 2011 was politicized. The Assad regime used the education system as a tool to glorify the state leader (president), and implant only the Ba'ath party's Arab pan nationalism, and secularization ideology. As Abu Houssam notes, students had to memorize all Hafez Assad's statements of wisdom, and Ba'ath

party's Arab nationalism rhetoric, and pass a written exam that assessed their knowledge and determined their mobilization to the following grades. Such a system created a generation of conformists that did not question authority figures, and did not dare to explore alternatives.

Also, it led to social and political stagnation in Syria because it did not promote critical thinking to discuss alternative ideas and solutions. Authoritarian regimes use political violence to suppress the opposition and have firm control over its population, as well as propaganda via media and education to establish and enforce the regime's legitimacy. Thus, the education system in the new Syria must not be politicized. On the contrary, it should teach students' natural and social sciences, tolerance, sympathy, as well as peace studies, logic and critical thinking.

6.10 - Conclusion

The ongoing civil war in Syria has disrupted the lives of millions of Syrians, inflicted pain and loss upon them, and damaged their peaceful intergroup coexistence and cooperation. The warring parties exploited sectarianism and demonized their perceived enemies to justify violence and the extermination of opponents. This eventually led to the normalization of violence and grave human rights atrocities. Nonetheless, all of my study participants continue to believe in the possibility of repairing intergroup relationships and restoring the communal peace and social stability that existed prior to the 2011 protests. Some participants parsed this work in terms of demanding retribution, while others argued for the power of forgiveness. In addition, some participants highlighted the crucial role of local intergroup leaders in trust-building and conflict resolution in post-peace

accord society. Others highlighted the central role of peace education in consolidating conflict transformation processes.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS

7.1 - Introduction

This chapter incorporates the overall key findings that emerged inductively from the study. It contains thoughts on the limitations of the study and recommended avenues for future research. The preceding qualitative chapters (4, 5, and 6) presented the major themes and sub-themes that stemmed from the participants' stories of their experiences in Syria before the eruption of the conflict in 2011, their analyses of the conflict trajectories, and their approaches and potential contributions to peacebuilding, reconciliation and conflict transformation.

The findings that stemmed from this study intend to contribute to the PACS literature by highlighting the instrumental role of diasporas in conflict dynamics and trajectories in their home countries; in particular, how do diaspora groups perceive peacebuilding and reconciliation? And how do they contribute to those two processes?

7.2 - Overall Key Findings

This study does not claim that its findings are representative of all of the Syrian diaspora living in Canada or elsewhere. The findings are representative of the study's participants. Nonetheless, the participants' voices in this study must be viewed as a part of that larger societal, even global dialogue around refugees fleeing war-torn countries, and their aspirations and potential contributions to peacebuilding, reconstruction, and development efforts in both the home and host countries. It is neither a totalizing, nor a monolithic viewpoint, but it is naturally complex, varied, and even divergent in ways. What unites the participants in this study is their shared experience of conflict and war

and coming to Canada as refugees, and their hopes and fears for themselves and their home country.

7.2.1 – Locals' Organic knowledge- Locals Pivotal Input in Conflict Analysis and Resolution

The theoretical concept that emerged inductively from this thesis research is “Organic Knowledge.” The study participants provided very insightful information about Syria before the conflict erupted in 2011. They explained the causes that contributed to conflict escalation, and they discussed the conflict outcomes (human rights atrocities and damage of intergroup relationships). Afterwards, they proposed practical measures to end the conflict, address the conflict outcomes, and build sustainable peace. The peacebuilding enterprise, like other fields, has a dichotomy of insiders versus outsiders’ knowledge. This study concludes that building sustainable peacebuilding in divided societies in post-peace accord milieus requires a hybrid approach that combines the efforts of locals who know the people’s needs, and acquire the deep understanding of conflict’s hidden-structural causes (organic knowledge), and outsiders who have the “know how” capabilities and resources. Individuals (the locals in conflict zones) must be given the opportunity to engage meaningfully in conflict analysis and resolution processes because they are the ones who would live under the peace agreement’s terms (Lederach, 1997, 116).

One of the general theme’s emanating from this study is peacebuilding and reconciliation. The interview questions posed did not include written or verbal follow-up questions about the causes of the conflict; rather, the interview questions focused

primarily on Syrian refugees' perceptions and potential contributions to peacebuilding and reconciliation processes in Syria. Notwithstanding, problem solving and conflict resolution require an accurate analysis that pinpoints the root causes of the conflict, in order to develop sufficient solutions to address them (Mac Ginty, 2006, 81-86; Lederach 1997, 24). As such, participants provided their analyses about the conflict, and proposed peacebuilding approaches that reflect their hopes and aspirations. Northern Ireland conflict was presented primarily in its most basic forms as a conflict between Protestants who wanted to remain part of the United Kingdom, and Catholics who wanted the reunification of the Island of Ireland. However, the conflict was deep rooted in history and an outcome of various forms of discrimination and injustices (Cairns & Darby, 1998, 754). Likewise, Syria's conflict should not be summed up in Assad Alawites regime, and anti-Assad Sunnis. The conflict is an outcome of complex arrays of factors. As such, Syrians people deserve to have a voice and identify those factors, and propose solutions to address them. Indeed, exploratory qualitative research starts with initial written questions that determine the frame of the study. However, the theme of conflict emerged inductively from the data because participants talked extensively about the conflict, and their experiences before, and during conflict.

To establish the context of the study, I asked participants merely to describe Syria before the eruption of the 2011 uprising, and now. This intended introductory question became a primary question because all the interviewees delved into details describing Syria economically, socially and politically before the eruption of the anti-government protests in 2011, when the protests escalated into armed struggle, and what is happening on the ground now.

The study participants' descriptions of Syrian society before 2011 pinpointed the manifestations of a society that lives under "Negative Peace." Generally, all study participants reported that Syria before 2011 was a stable country with a relatively good economic growth, decent living conditions, and peaceful intergroup co-existence marked largely with amity, solidarity, and cooperation (the absence of war). Nonetheless, they reported as well that Syrians were living in a police-state under the Assad regime. They did not have their freedom of expression to criticize government officials (president, and ministers), and discuss political issues, they lived in fear, and under suspicion due to the state of emergency that granted the police and intelligence security branches unlimited discretionary powers. In addition, they experienced discrimination and inequality based on one's ethnoreligious identity with regards to appointments in government and military jobs, and in receiving public services (structural violence).

However, when I asked the study participants, what should be done to end the conflict and restore peace? What should be done to build sustainable peace? What constitutes a successful peace resolution? Surprisingly enough, the participants' responses and proposals addressed the root causes that instigated the uprising, the factors that escalated the conflict, and the outcomes of the civil war. To end the conflict, all participants proposed the expulsion of foreign militants/militias, demilitarization, and the transformation of destructive role of regional and regional powers into peace guarantors. Further, to build a just and sustainable peace in in post-peace accord Syria, they addressed the manifestations of physical and structural violence (political oppression, kinship, nepotism, corruption, abuse of power, and discrimination based on ethnoreligious identity), They proposed the introduction of democratization, creation of a

multiparty system, the organization of free and transparent elections, the protection of people's freedom of expression, as well as the promotion of equality, inclusiveness, intergroup trust-building, mutual respect, and the rule of law.

Further, all participants asserted that sectarianism and international politics contributed to the escalation and prolongation of the conflict. As the conflict counterparts accentuated their sectarian identities, the uprising transformed into a sectarian civil war (Alawites/Shia versus Sunni-led rebels). Such a context led to a regional rivalry in Syria between Iran that proclaims to be the protector of Shia minorities worldwide, and Saudi Arabia that proclaims to be the custodian of the Sunnis. Iran and its sponsored militant groups, particularly Hezbollah, and Iraqi militias intervened militarily in Syria to support Assad forces. In reaction, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Arab states, and Turkey supported Sunni-led rebels with arms, as well as financially, and politically.

Iran and Saudi Arabia confront each other indirectly in numerous fronts in the Middle East in Lebanon, Iraq, Bahrain, and Yemen. Driven by their sectarian identity, and geopolitical ambitions, the two regional rivals sponsor conflict counterparts in Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen, and Bahrain. Thus, they contribute significantly to the continuity of conflict and sectarian tension in those countries, and thereby undermine the region's stability and security (Poole, 2016; The Guardian, 2018). Therefore, all of my study participants demanded the expulsion of foreign militants, and disarmament in order to end the conflict in Syria and initiate the peacebuilding processes. Subsequently, all of the study participants unanimously believed that ending the conflict in Syria is in the hands of external powers; particularly, the United States, and Russia. However, the Assad regime and rebels are agents that act on behalf of their external regional and international

sponsors. As noted by all participants, if the US and Russia end their rivalry in Syria and reach an agreement, then the Syrian warring parties will submit to the directives of their external sponsors, halt violence and reach a resolution.

In addition, all of the interviewees proposed solutions to address the outcomes of the violent civil war. To address the human atrocities that the conflict counterparts committed in Syria since 2011 (Assad forces, rebels, and terrorist groups), some participants proposed the prosecution of perpetrators highlighting individual accountability, as opposed to capital punishment. However, others proposed forgetting and forgiving, and reparations for victims and their families as a way forward towards reconciliation. The former group believed that the persecution of perpetrators would provide justice and closure to victims and their families, which would be a bedrock in the foundation of peacebuilding and reconciliation processes. However, the latter group believed that persecution of perpetrators would take a very long time, and may lead to the stagnation or the failure of peacebuilding efforts. The latter group stand could be interpreted as a pragmatic/realistic, because as noted by Abu Hassan and Majd it is less practical to persecute all perpetrators. Also, the process might jeopardize the peace and lead to conflict re-eruption.

Furthermore, my interviewees suggested the implementation of educational reform to consolidate the reconciliation process, and to use traditional conflict resolution mechanisms such as *Sulaha*, and *Tahkim* to restore peaceful intergroup co-existence and social stability, and resolve potential future intergroup conflicts. That implies that applying the Western neoliberal processes without taking in consideration, or

incorporating the ethno-cultural and religious nuances might lead to minimal success of the peace effort, if not its failure (Abu Nimer, 1996, 24).

Overall, conflict resolution must stem from an accurate conflict analysis. The conflict analyses of individuals who have been affected by the conflict (refugees, and internally displaced persons) reflect the insiders' knowledge about the hidden factors that instigated the conflict, and led to its escalation, and address the implications of the conflict especially the human rights violations. Refugees are victims of conflicts, and human rights violations. Their perceptions of peace and reconciliation are extremely important, because if they are dissatisfied about peace and reconciliation mechanisms, then that peace becomes indeed what Mac Ginty (2008) calls "fragile peace." Therefore, refugees' perceptions of the conflict and peace, and their approaches to transform the conflict reflect organic knowledge entitles them to have a leading role in all stages of the peacebuilding efforts, analysis, problemsolving, policy development, decision-making, implementation, and the assessment of the peacebuilding initiatives. In other words, building sustainable peace in post-conflict requires the recruitment and mobilization of locals to be everyday peacebuilders in their communities.

7.2.2 - The Role of Local Communal Leaders in Peacebuilding Efforts

Syria is a mosaic community formed by diverse religions, sects, and ethnic groups. Since the country lacks unity and becomes deeply divided along different forms of cleavages, the country's elites end up representing their own groups and protecting their in-group aggregate interests. The Assad regime abolished political parties and presented the Ba'ath party as the sole representative of the state and people. Therefore, the country does not have political elites that are accepted nationally outside of their

regions and in-groups. In other words, the political elites that could assume power in a post-peace accord Syria may lack national support and legitimacy, which may lead to creating a communal representative quota system in government and parliament. Such a scenario may jeopardize the peacebuilding processes because that will create more divisions. Unless, the elites surpass their in-group/communal loyalties and build national coalitions, the country will live under a fragile peace and re-live Iraq's current status quo. Repairing the damaged intergroup relationships will require intensive efforts at the grassroots level. In such processes, local communal leaders are best equipped to lead the conflict transformation process. Ordinary Syrians still abide by the directions and decisions of their communal leaders. As mentioned above, the study participants asserted that intergroup communal leaders, Sheikhs, have played a crucial role in sustaining peaceful intergroup co-existence in the past and ought to be involved for the future. The role of community leaders in post-conflict Syria is pivotal in peacebuilding processes whether Assad prevails against rebels, or conflict ends with a peace agreement. As Abu Hassan noted the community leaders' authority is consensual/community-based; it is not obtain from the government. Therefore, they have the legitimacy, and moral authority to influence people, repair intergroup relationships, and prevent intergroup conflict escalation.

7.2.3 - Relative Peace – Negative Peace – Liminal Peace

In 2011, the Syrian people protested peacefully to demand social justice, democracy, freedom, and the rule of law, and reject corruption, political violence, sectarianism, and inequality. In other words, they protested against structural violence

and demanded the building of a just and equitable society. However, the transformation of the protests into a protracted sectarian civil war destroyed the country's infrastructure, social stability, and peaceful intergroup cohabitation and cooperation, causing a humanitarian catastrophe that has had serious sociopolitical repercussions in the MENA, Europe, and North America.

The disastrous humanitarian outcomes of the ongoing civil war broke Syrian peoples' hopes and dreams to build a free, just, and democratic society (positive peace). Consequently, today, most Syrians simply hope for the end of the conflict and the restoration of the status quo that existed before the 2011 protests. In fact, some Syrians wished if the uprising had not erupted in Syria, and they do not mind if Assad remains in power as long as the conflict ends. In other words, Syrians strived for positive peace in 2011. However, the trajectories of the conflict forced them to settle for the relative peace (absence of war/ negative peace) that existed before the 2011 uprising.

The study participants strive to end the conflict and restore the status quo that existed before the 2011 uprising (Absence of war/relative peace). However, that acceptance will not last-long, and eventually will be revoked by the next generation. For instance, Syrians who witnessed, and/or heard about the 1982 Hama Massacre were deterred from revolting against the Hafez Assad regime for twenty-nine years (1982-2011). However, Syrian youth who were born in late 1980s and 1990s became the backbone and driving force of the 2011 protests against the regime's heir, Bashar Assad. As Majd and Abu Hussam noted, primarily youth led the anti-government protests; however, adults were afraid/reluctant to participate in the protests in early days of the uprising driven their sense of fear. In short, the current generation of Syrians may accept

to live under negative peace (the absence of war) and systematic-structural violence. However, it is likely that future generations will revolt once more to demand socioeconomic justice, equality, and freedom, if such changes are not made under peace.

Further, due to the Russian, Iranian and Hezbollah military support to Assad regime, pro-Assad forces regained control over the majority of Syria Territories. Thus, the study participants' aspirations for democratization, equality, rule of law, and prosecution of human rights perpetrators are less feasible. Pro-Assad forces are more likely to be regarded as patriotic heroes, and rebels will be prosecuted traitors/terrorists. Therefore, under Assad regime Syria is more likely to live under a fragile/relative peace. Nonetheless, in both scenarios, the role of external powers and local communal leaders is vital to sustain peace, and restore intergroup peaceful co-existence.

7.2.4 - Diasporas' Role in Peacebuilding and Development

Diasporas' involvement in national politics in their respective home countries helps determine the continuity of peace and social stability. It also influences conflict dynamics and the success of peacebuilding, reconciliation, and development processes. All of the Syrian refugees who participated in this study strive to end the conflict and restore peace in Syria. In fact, even who explicitly expressed anti-Assad regime sentiment declared that they would not support the continuity of the civil war, even if Assad prevails against the rebels or they disapprove of the terms of a potential peace accord. All study participants still have siblings, relatives, and friends in Syria. They are still in contact with them, and they are aware of their daily life struggles and safety hazards.

Therefore, all of the study's participants strive for the conflict to end so that the suffering of their family members and fellow Syrian citizens in Syria can also cease.

According to all participants, the Syrian diaspora is fragmented and does not have the organizational capacity necessary to contribute to conflict resolution processes and influence the governments of their host countries to play a role in mediating the conflict. Nonetheless, all of my respondents asserted that Syrians abroad could (and must) support their families in Syria financially in order to mitigate the situation. Ultimately, despite the fact that the Syrian diaspora lacks the collective capacity needed for direct peacebuilding, it nonetheless can serve in the crucial roles of economic development, poverty reduction, and state-rebuilding. The ongoing conflict in Syria has led to unemployment, food, and medicine shortages, disruption of water and electricity supplies, and the skyrocketing of prices for all goods. In such a context, individual remittances of Syrians living abroad contributed to poverty alleviation for their family members. Therefore, international aid efforts need to consider using refugees abroad as channels for aid transfer to zones of conflict. Such alternative may increase aid efficiency by decreasing the administration costs of aid agencies.

Lederach (1997, 20) asserts that peacebuilding is not merely a post-peace accord one-time intervention process; rather, it is a comprehensive long-term process based on multiple peacebuilding strategies that aim to transform conflicts and shift societies towards sustainable peace. That process starts before reaching a peace agreement and continues through a post-peace treaty with trust-building, capacity-building, reconciliation, healing and forgiveness, inclusiveness, justice, and economic empowerment (see Barsky, 2011, 215; Byrne, 2001; Byrne, Thiessen & Fissuh, 2011;

Keating & Knight, 2004, 120-135; Pugh, 2011, 312-313). As noted by Hassan Talib, Kamal, and Abu Hassan, despite the intergroup damage the conflict has caused amongst Syrians, they still maintain channels of communication through the Internet, social media, and telephone. Maintaining that communication between pro-Assad and anti-Assad Syrians inside and outside of Syria is a form of peacebuilding effort that starts before the end of the conflict. Therefore, the focus should not primarily be on Assad and the opposition leadership, it should also be on the ordinary Syrian people because a long-lasting peace is based on their acceptance of the peace terms, and their accepting to live together peacefully.

7.2.5 - Peacebuilding Approaches in Syria

Generally, all study participants demanded the implementation of certain elements of the neoliberal peacebuilding approach, including the organization of free and transparent elections, and the promotion of equality, inclusiveness, and the rule of law. Additionally, some of my respondents demanded the prosecution of human rights perpetrators. Notably, my interviewees did not mention the much needed economic transformation of the society. Even those participants who opposed the uprising and regime change demanded reforms in favour of justice, equality, and the rule of law – the original spirit in which the protests started in Syria in 2011.

The implementation of political and socioeconomic reforms by promoting political freedom, human rights, the rule of law, equality, and inclusiveness is highly likely to contribute to building a long-lasting peace in Syria. However, the implementation of specifically neoliberal economic measures such as cutting the

spending of public social programs, privatization, and ending the subsidization of basic goods may foster further socioeconomic injustices, thereby creating the basis for another social uprising. For example, the pursuit of neoliberal economic reform measures in post-peace accord Kosovo led to a rise of the unemployment rate, the privatization of state-owned organizations, and the implementation of fiscal austerity measures, which subsequently, affected the quality of public social services that increased the rate of unemployment and caused social unrest (Pugh, 2011, 309; for more details also see Pugh, 2006). Hinnebusch (2012, 95–113) explained the Syrian government's rapid shift towards "liberal economy," privatization, the cancelation of subsidies, reform of the banking system, and the welcoming of foreign direct investment, instead of gradual economic reform, was driven by Syria's 2006-2010 accelerated plan for succession to the World Trade Organization. Therefore, economic reforms in post-peace accord Syria must take such considerations into account to prevent future social unrest, and/or the re-emergence of conflict.

Syria is a diverse country ethnopolitically. Therefore, building sustainable peace in post-conflict Syria requires building a new political system, a constitutional democratic system based on powersharing, and inclusion of all Syrian groups. A federal system might be helpful. One family (the Assad dynasty), one leader (Hafez Assad, then Bashar), and one political party (Ba'ath) has ruled Syria for over four decades (since 1970) and that form of sociopolitical reductionism has proven a failure and unsustainable.

7.2.6 - The Role of External Guarantors in Peacebuilding and Reconciliation Processes

Reychler (2017) contends that peacemaking, and peacekeeping are part of the peacebuilding process. All study participants believed that the peace talks between the Assad regime and the opposition are ultimately unproductive and might even be disingenuous. They asserted that the end of conflict (peacemaking) is subject to the whims and desires of Russia and the United States, not an agreement between Assad and the rebels. Regional powers (Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran) and international powers (the United States, the European Union, and Russia) have determined the trajectories of Syria's ongoing conflict. In particular, if the United States and Russia put aside their differences, constant rivalry, and geopolitical calculations, it is likely that the conflict counterparts would follow suit (peacekeeping). Russia has great influence over Assad, Iran and Turkey. Likewise, the United States has great influence over Saudi Arabia and other regional sponsors of the rebels.

The prolongation of the Syrian civil war is attributed mainly to the support of external regional and international powers to the conflict counterparts. Thus, the role of external guarantors is vital in conflict resolution (peacemaking), as well as in the post-peace accord period through financial and political support for economic development and reconstruction (peacebuilding), and security and logistical support (peacekeeping). The end of violence is one of the main dividends of peace. Nonetheless, building sustainable peace will require financial support to rebuild Syria, and help its economy to recover, and assist Syrian people to rebuild their lives. A peace agreement without a meaningful economic support from international powers and aid from international financial institutions (World Bank, IMF) will establish a virtual peace, not a sustainable

peace. Nonetheless, external financial and economic aid must not be accompanied with neoliberal preconditions.

7.3 - Future Research

This study explored how members of the Syrian refugee diaspora in British Columbia perceive the conflict and peace in Syria, and how they intend to contribute to peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts now and in post potential peace accord. Indeed, all study participants expressed with a great certitude their willingness to contribute to peacebuilding and reconstruction of Syria. However, because the Syrian diaspora is fragmented and has neither the resources, nor the organizational capacity to contribute to conflict resolution, future research should focus on accurately mapping the refugee's capacities either specifically in Canada or in other host countries.

In addition, this study sought to recruit participants that were representative of some of the various subsets of Syrian society. That goal was largely achieved. The research participants were diverse. The respondents comprised of different gender, age, profession, educational attainment, and their region of residence. Nonetheless, except for Kamal who is Christian most of the interviewees were Sunnis. It is important to note that the findings from this small sample cannot be extrapolated to the wider Syrian diaspora living in Canada or elsewhere. Some may say that the absence of Alawites persons in this study could have skewed the study findings. Such a conclusion might have merits if all study participants are anti-Assad and supported the continuity of the conflict; however, as we discussed in the qualitative chapters, chapter 4, 5, and 6, not all Sunnis are anti-Assad or pro-rebels. The conflict has caused intra groups divisions about the conflict counterparts (Assad vs., Rebels). In fact, divisions exist even within the same families

members. At the same time, this limitation may be useful to consider in future research, alongside other demographical assessments about proposed resolutions to better understand how, and why certain subsets of society view peace and their role in peace in particular ways.

7.4 - Conclusions

This qualitative research study inquired about the role of diasporas in conflict dynamics and trajectories in their respective home countries using the Syrian refugee diaspora as a case study. In particular, I sought to explore how do Syrian refugees perceive the ongoing conflict in their homeland? How they perceive peacebuilding and reconciliation? What would constitute sustainable peace in Syria? And how do they intend to contribute to conflict transformation processes? Conflict resolution requires an accurate understanding of the hidden and facets complex factors of the conflict, and the implementation of a multilevel approach. Ironically, all study participants provided indepth conflict analysis, and proposed multiple solutions and approaches that if incorporated in future peacebuilding efforts would contribute to building a long-lasting peace in Syria. According to my study participants, the path towards building sustainable peace requires democratization, creation of a multi-party system, organization of free and transparent election, promotion of equality, inclusiveness, and rule of law, including local leaders, *Sheikhs*, in the peacebuilding process, and reformation of the educational system to promote intergroup tolerance, mutual respect, and culture of difference.

It is hoped that the data collected in this study, and key findings inform the policy-making and decision makers of the peacebuilding enterprise about the necessity of

including refugees, and local voices in peacebuilding efforts, and considering the ethno-cultural nuances of their societies.

References

- Abdul Cader, A. (2017). Islamic principles of conflict management. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, 17(3), pp. 345-363.
- Abu-Nimer, M. (1996). Conflict Resolution in an Islamic Context: Some Conceptual Questions. *Peace & Change*, 21(1), pp. 22-40.
- Abu Nimer, M. (1996). Conflict Resolution Approaches: Western and Middle Eastern Lessons and Possibilities. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 55(1), pp. 35-52.
- Abu-Nimer, M. (2013). Religion and Peacebuilding. In R. Mac Ginty (Ed.). *Routledge handbook of peacebuilding*. (ed. Chapter page range). London, UK: Routledge.
- Allison, R. (2013). Russia and Syria: Explaining alignment with a regime in crisis. *International Affairs*, 89(4), 795-823
<https://primo-pmtna01.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo->
- Aljazeera (2015). Syria's war and veto-wielding UN powerplays: With the UN Security Council so often deadlocked, reformers are pushing to rein in the all-powerful veto. Retrieved from:
<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/09/syria-war-veto-wielding-powerplays-150930064603153.html>
- Al Jazeera News (2016 April 23). Syria death toll: UN envoy estimates 400,000 killed. Middle East. Retrieved from <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/04/staffan-demistura-400000-killed-syria-civil-war-160423055735629.html>
- Al Jazeera News (2017 October 26). UN panel blames Syrian forces for Khan Sheikhoun attack. Middle East. Retrieved from
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/10/panel-blames-syrian-forces-khan-sheikhoun-attack-171026212414046.html>
- Amnesty International News (2017 March 14). Amnesty International Marks Sixth Anniversary of Syrian War. Retrieved from
<http://www.amnestyusa.org/news/press-releases/amnesty-international-marks-sixth-anniversary-of-syrian-war>
- Amnesty International Research (2017 February 7). Syria: Human Slaughterhouse: Mass Hanging and Extermination at Saydnaya Prison. Retrieved from
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde24/5415/2017/en/>
- Atassi Mohamed Ali (2011). My Syria, Awake again after 40 years. The New York Times. Retrieved from:
<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/27/opinion/27Atassi.html>

- Ayunts, A., Zolyan, M., & Zakaryan, T. (2016) Nagorny Karabakh Conflict: Prospects for Conflict Transformation. *Nationalities Papers*, 44(4), pp. 543-559.
- Babbie, E. (1989). *The practice of social research / Earl Babbie*. (5th ed.). Belmont, California.: Wadsworth Pub.
- Barsky, A.E. (2011). A capacity-building approach to conflict resolution. In D.J.D. Sandole, S. Byrne, I. Sandole-Staroste, and J. Senehi (Eds.). *Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution* (pp. 215-225) USA and Canada: Routledge
- Bar-Tal, D., Rosen Y., & Nets-Zehgut, R. (2009) *Handbook on peace education*. London: Psychology Press
- BBC News (2011 August 18) Chile recognizes 9,800 more victims of Pinochet's rule. Latin America. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-14584095>
- BBC News (2013 December 13). Guide to the Syrian rebels. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-24403003>
- BBC News (2015 October 1) Russia joins war in Syria: Five Key Points. Middle East. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-344119>
- BBC News (2015 December 16) Syria conflict: 'Caesar' torture photos authentic - Human Rights Watch. Middle East. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35110877>
- BBC News (2016 March 11). Syria: the story of the conflict. Middle East. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26116868>
- BBC News (2017 April 7) Syria war: A brief guide to who's fighting whom. Middle East. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-39528673>
- BBC News (2018 April 24) Syria Profile-Timeline. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703995>
- BBC News (2018 July 10) Syria war: What we know about Douma 'chemical attack.' Middle East. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-43697084>
- BBC News (2018 September 7) Why is there a war in Syria? Middle East. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35806229>
- Bogdan, R. and Biklen S. K. (2007) *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theories and Methods*. 5th Edition. Boston: Pearson Allyn & Bacon.

- Boudreau Thomas. (2011) When the Killing Begins: An Epistemic Inquiry Into Violent Human Conflict, Contested Truths, and Multiplex Methodologies. In Matyók, T., Senehi, J., & Byrne, S. *Critical issues in peace and conflict studies: theory, practice, and pedagogy*. (pp. 19-42) Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Bretherton, D., Weston, J., & Zbar, V. (2003). Peace education in a post-conflict environment: The case of Sierra Leone. *Prospects*, 33(2), pp. 219-230.
- Bryant, J. (2014) Conflict Evolution: Tracking the Middle East Conflict with Drama Theory. *Group Decision and Negotiation*. 23(6), pp. 1263-1279.
- Bush, K. (2007) "Diaspora as Peacebuilders: Considerations for Analysis, Policy and Practice," in A. Swain (ed.) *Diasporas armed conflict and peacebuilding in their homelands*. Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala University, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Report No. 79.
- Byrne, S. (1995) Conflict regulation or conflict resolution: Third-party intervention in The Northern Ireland conflict—prospects for peace. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 7(2), pp.1-24.
- Byrne, S., & Keashly, L. (2000). Working with ethno-political conflict: A multi-modal approach. *International Peacekeeping*. 7(1), pp.97-120.
- Byrne, S. (2000) Power politics as usual in Cyprus and Northern Ireland: Divided islands and the roles of external ethno-guarantors. *Nationalism and ethnic politics*. 6(1), pp. 1-23.
- Byrne, S. (2001) Transformational Conflict Resolution and the Northern Ireland Conflict. *International Journal on World Peace*. 18(2), pp.3-22. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20753300>
- Byrne, S. & Carter, N. (2002) Social cubism: Six social forces of ethnopolitical conflict in Northern Ireland and Quebec. *ILSA Journal of International & Comparative Law*. 8(3), pp. 741-769.
- Byrne, S., Carter, N. & Senehi, J. (May 2003) Social Cubism and Social Conflict: Analysis and Resolution. *Journal of International and Comparative Law*. 8(3), pp. 725-740.
- Byrne, S, Thiessen, C., & Fissuh, E. (2007). Economic assistance and peacebuilding in Northern Ireland. *Peace Research*. 39(1), pp. 7-22 & 158-160. Retrieved from <http://uml.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.uml.idm.oclc.org/docview/213492486?accountid=14569>
- Byrne, S. (2007). The roles of external ethno-guarantors and primary mediators in

- Cyprus and Northern Ireland. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*. 24:10, pp. 149-172.
- Byrne, S. & Senehi J. (2011). Conflict analysis and resolution as a multidiscipline: A work in progress. In D.J.D. Sandole, S. Byrne, I. Sandole-Staroste, & J. Senehi (Eds.). *Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution* (pp. 3-12). USA and Canada: Routledge.
- Byrne, S., Irvin, C. & Fissuh, E. (2011). The perception of economic assistance in Northern Ireland and its role in the peace process. In D.J.D. Sandole, S. Byrne, I. Sandole-Staroste, & J. Senehi (Eds.). *Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution* (pp. 475-494). USA and Canada: Routledge.
- Byrne, S. & Nadan, A. (2011) Social Cube Analytic Model and Protracted Ethnoterritorial Conflict. In Matyók, T., Senehi, J., & Byrne, S. (Eds). *Critical issues in peace and conflict studies: Theory, practice, and pedagogy* (pp. 61-80) Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Byrne, S. & Senehi, J. (2012) *VIOLENCE: Analysis, intervention and prevention*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press.
- Cairns, E, and Darby, J. (1998) The Conflict in Northern Ireland: Causes, Consequences, and controls. *American Psychologist*. 53, pp. 754-760.
- Cochrane, F., Baser, B., & Swain, A. (2009) Home Thoughts from Abroad: Diasporas and Peace-Building in Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*. 32(8), pp. 681-704.
- Cook-Huffman, C. (2011). The role of identity in conflict. In D.J.D. Sandole, S. Byrne, I. Sandole-Staroste & J Senehi (Eds.). *Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution* (pp. 19-31). USA and Canada: Routledge.
- Crimes against Humanity and War Crimes Act. (2000). Government of Canada. Retrieved from <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-45.9/>
- Cunningham, T. (2016). Cutting with the Grain: Human Rights, Conflict Transformation and the Urban Planning System—Lessons from Northern Ireland. *Human Rights Review*. 17(3), pp. 329-347.
- Darby, J. (2001). *The effects of violence on peace processes* / John Darby. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press.
- De Châtel, F. (2014) The Role of Drought and Climate Change in the Syrian Uprising: Untangling the Triggers of the Revolution. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 50(4), pp. 521-535.
- Deutsch, M. (2014) Justice and conflict. In P.T. Colman, M. Deutsch & E.C. Marcus

- (Eds.) *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*. (pp. 29-55)
Location: Jossey-Bass.
- DiCicco-Bloom, B., & Crabtree, B. (2006) The qualitative research interview. *Medical Education*. 40(4), pp. 314-321.
- Dilts, A. (2012) Revisiting Johan Galtung's Concept of Structural Violence. *New Political Science*, 34(2), pp. 191-194.
- Donnelly, J. (2013) *Universal human rights in theory and practice*. (2nd edition)
Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- The Economist. (August 6, 2016). The ruining of Egypt. Retrieved from
<http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21703374-repression-and-incompetence-abdel-fattah-al-sisi-are-stoking-next-uprising>
- Edwards, A. (2018 June 19) Forced displacement at record 68.5 million. *UNHCR, News Stories*. Retrieved from
<http://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2018/6/5b222c494/forced-displacement-record-685-million.html>
- Elliott, E.M. (2011). *Security with care: restorative justice and healthy societies*. Halifax, Canada: Fernwood Publishing.
- Elman, M. (1997) *Paths to peace: is democracy the answer?* (CSIA studies in International security). Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Elmir, R., Schmied, V., Jackson, D. & Wilkes, L. (2011) Interviewing people about potentially sensitive topics. (Qualitative research)[Report]. *Nurse Researcher*, 19(1), pp. 12.
- Entous, A. & Nissenbaum, D. (2014 July 25) 10,000 Bodies: Inside Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's Crackdown. *The Wall Street Journal*. Middle East. Retrieved from
<https://www.wsj.com/articles/10-000-bodies-inside-syrian-president-bashar-al-assads-crackdown-1406315472>
- Entous, A. (2017 February 2) A photo of her brother's corpse popped up on her phone. Now Syrian officials could be put on trial for war crimes. *The Washington Post*. National Security. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/from-a-trove-of-grim-photos-a-case-against-assads-government/2017/02/01/728575d0-e8d7-11e6-bf6f-301b6b443624_story.html?tid=a_inl&utm_term=.5f6648575850
- Faiola, A. & Noack, R.. (2017) For Syrian Victims, the path to Justice runs

- through Europe. *The Washington Post*. Europe. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/for-syrian-victims-the-path-to-justice-runs-through-europe/2017/03/01/1b947f4c-fe8e-11e6-9b78-824ccab94435_story.html?utm_term=.86d3184ab447
- Freire, P. (2000) *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. (30th anniversary ed.). New York, NY: Continuum Books.
- Fisher, R., Ury, W. & Patton, B. (2011) *Getting to yes: Negotiating agreement without giving in*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.
- Galtung, J., & Høivik, T. (1971) Structural and Direct Violence. *Journal of Peace Research*. 8(1), pp. 73-76.
- Gearan, A., DeYoung, K. & Englund, W. (2013 September 9) "Syria says it 'welcomes' Russia proposal on chemical weapons." *The Washington Post*, Middle East. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/john-kerry-in-london-campaigns-for-world-to-support-military-strike-against-syria/2013/09/09/e8ad7a72-193d-11e3-80ac-96205cacb45a_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.7167628784cf
- Given, L. M. (2008). *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods* (Vols. 1-0). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: 10.4135/9781412963909
- Government of Canada. (2000 June 24) Canada's Crimes against Humanity and War Crimes Act. Retrieved from http://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/international_relations-relations_internationales/icc-cpi/war_crimes-crimes_guerre.aspx?lang=eng
- Government of Canada. (2017 May 4) #WelcomeRefugees: Canada resettled Syrian refugees. Retrieved from http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/welcome/index.asp?utm_source=cic-homepage-eng&utm_medium=homepage-feature&utm_campaign=refugees2015
- Government of Canada. (2018 March 12) Syrian Refugees - Monthly IRCC update. Retrieved from <https://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/01c85d28-2a81-4295-9c06-4af792a7c209>
- Government of Canada (June 2018) [Newsletter]. Retrieved from <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/enewsletter/archives/2018-june.asp>
- Greer, L., Jehn, K., & Mannix, E. (2008) Conflict Transformation. *Small Group Research*. 39(3), pp. 278-302.
- Hammond, A. & Amara, T. (2011 July 1) Tunisians take pride in "Arab spring" slogans,

- humor. *Reuters*. Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-tunisia-uprisings-humour-idUSTRE76013520110701>
- Heathershaw, J. (2013) Towards better theories of peacebuilding: beyond the liberal peace debate. *Peacebuilding*. 1(2), pp. 275-282.
- Holland, S. & Stewart P. (2018 April 14) U.S., Britain, France launch air strikes against Syria over chemical weapons attack. *The Globe and Mail*, U.S. Politics. Retrieved from <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/us-politics/article-trump-announces-plans-to-strike-syria/>
- Hinnebusch, R. (1993). Asad's Syria and the new world order: The struggle for regime survival. *Middle East Policy*. 2(1), pp. 1.
- Hinnebusch, R. (2012) Syria: From “Authoritarian Upgrading” to Revolution? *International Affairs*. 88 (1), pp. 95–113.
- Human Rights Watch. (2015 December 16) Syria: Stories Behind Photos of Killed Detainees. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/12/16/syria-stories-behind-photos-killed-detainees>
- Human Rights Watch. (2016) Syria: Event of 2016. The 2016 Annual Report. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/syria>
- Human Rights Watch. (2017 February 13). Syria: Coordinated Chemical Attacks on Aleppo. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/02/13/syria-coordinated-chemical-attacks-aleppo>
- Hutchison E. & Bleiker R. (2013) Reconciliation. In Mac Ginty, R. (Ed.). *Routledge Handbook of Peacebuilding*. (pp. 81-90) London, UK: Routledge.
- Hyde, J. & Byrne, S. (2015) The International Fund for Ireland and the European Union Peace III Fund: The Impact of Reconciliation and Peacebuilding in Northern Ireland and the Border Area. *International Journal of Conflict Engagement and Resolution*. 3(2), pp. 93-115.
- International Monetary Fund. (2018) Syrian Arab Republic Real GDP 2000-2010.. Retrieved from: <http://www.imf.org/en/Countries/SYR>
- Jappah, J.Z. & Smith, D.T. (2013) Transitional justice: Prioritizing truth commissions or international tribunals to ensure healing and reconciliation.(Essay). *Journal of International and Global Studies*. 5(1), pp. 1.
- Jarstad, A., & Sisk, T.D. (2008) *From war to democracy: dilemmas of peacebuilding*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Jeong, H. (2010). Conflict Transformation. In Editor names (Eds) *The Oxford International Encyclopedia of Peace*. (page range) Location: Publisher.
- Jolle, D. (2002) Diaspora and Conflict: Locality, Long-Distance Nationalism, and Delocalisation of Conflict Dynamics, *Javnost - The Public*. 9(1), pp. 85-96.
- Joseph, S. (2012) Social Media, Political Change, and Human Rights. *Boston College International and Comparative Law Review*. 35(1), pp. 145-188.
- Kaphle, A. (2014 January 20) Timeline: Unrest in Syria. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/apps/g/page/world/timeline-unrest-in-syria/207/>
- Kareem, S. (2018 July 13) Assad's forces retake Daraa, birthplace of Syria's uprising. *The Irish Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/middle-east/assad-s-forces-retake-daraa-birthplace-of-syria-s-uprising-1.3564063>
- Keating, T. & Knight, W. A. (2004) *Building sustainable peace*. Edmonton, Canada: University of Alberta Press.
- Kelley, C.P., Mohtadi, S., Cane M.A., Seager, R., & Kushnir, Y. (2015) Climate change in the Fertile Crescent and implications of the Recent Syrian drought. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. 112(11), pp. 3241-326. Retrieved from https://primo-pmtna01.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=TN_pnas112_11_3241&context=PC&vid=UMB&lang=en_US&search_scope=UManitoba&adaptor=primo_central_multiple_fe&tab=default_tab&query=any,contains,%20Climate%20change%20in%20the%20Fertile%20Crescent%20and%20implications%20of%20the%20recent%20Syrian%20drought&sortby=rank&mode=basic
- Kelman, H. (1998) Social-psychological Contributions to Peacemaking and Peacebuilding in the Middle East. *Applied Psychology = Psychologie Appliquée*. 47(1), pp. 5-28.
- Kelman, H. (2011) A social-psychological approach to conflict analysis and resolution. In D.J.D. Sandole, S. Byrne, I. Sandole-Staroste & J. Senehi (Eds.). *Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution* (pp. 170-200). USA and Canada: Routledge.
- Kent, G. (2006). Organised diaspora networks and homeland peacebuilding: the Bosnian world diaspora network as a potential development actor. *Conflict, Security & Development*. 6(3), pp. 449-469.
- Kimball, D. & Davenport, K. (2018 August 17). Timeline of Syrian Chemical Weapons

- Activity 2012-2018. *Arms Control Association*, Fact Sheets & Briefs. Retrieved from:
<https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Timeline-of-Syrian-Chemical-Weapons-Activity>
- Koinova, M. (2011) Diasporas and secessionist conflicts: the mobilization of the Armenian, Albanian and Chechen diasporas. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. 34(2), pp. 333-356.
- Korostelina, K.V. (2011) Identity conflicts: Models of Dynamics and early warning. In D.J.D. Sandole, S. Byrne, I. Sandole-Staroste & J. Senehi (Eds.). *Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution*. (pp. 100-115). USA and Canada: Routledge.
- Kriesberg, L. (2011) Waging conflicts constructively. In D.J.D. Sandole, S. Byrne, I. Sandole-Staroste & J. Senehi (Eds.). *Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution* (pp. 157-169). USA and Canada: Routledge.
- Kyuchukov, H. & New, W. (2016) Peace education with refugees: case studies. *Intercultural Education*. 27(6), pp. 635-640.
- Lacher, Wolfram ; Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik -SWP- Deutsches Institut für Internationale Politik und Sicherheit
 (Ed.): Fault lines of the revolution: political actors, camps and conflicts in the new Libya. Berlin, 2013 (SWP Research Paper 4/2013). URN:
<http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-385666>
- Lafontaine, F. (2014 May 19). Universal Jurisdiction in Canada: Quebec Court of Appeal Judgment in Muryaneza Clarifies the Law and Paves the Way for Future (unlikely) Cases. *Quid Justitiae*. Retrieved from
<http://www.cdiph.ulaval.ca/blogue/universal-jurisdiction-canada-quebec-court-appeal-judgement-muryaneza-clarifies-law-and-paves>
- Lauritzen, S. (2016) Building peace through education in a post-conflict environment: A case study exploring perceptions of best practices. *International Journal of Educational Development*. 51, pp.77-83.
- Lederach, J. (1996) *Preparing for peace: Conflict transformation across cultures*. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press.
- Lederach, J. (1997) *Building peace: Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press.
- Leonardsson, H. & Rudd G. (2015) The 'local turn' in peacebuilding: A literature review of effective and emancipatory local peacebuilding. *Third World Quarterly*. 36(5), pp. 825-839.

- Lombardo, G. (2015) The responsibility to protect and the lack of intervention in Syria between the protection of human rights and geopolitical strategies, *The International Journal of Human Rights*. 19:8, pp. 1190-1198.
- Ma'oz, M. & Yaniv, A. (2014) *Syria under Assad: Domestic constraints and regional risks*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Mac Ginty, R., Muldoon, O. & Ferguson, N. (2007) No War, No Peace: Northern Ireland after the Agreement. *Political Psychology*. 28(1), pp. 1-11.
- Mac Ginty, R. (2008) Indigenous Peace-Making Versus the Liberal Peace. *Cooperation and Conflict*. 43(2), pp.139-163.
- Mac Ginty, R. (2013) *Routledge Handbook of Peacebuilding*. London, UK: Routledge Ltd M.U.A.
- Mac Ginty, R., & Richmond, O. (2013) The Local Turn in Peace Building: a critical agenda for peace, *Third World Quarterly*. 34(5), pp. 763-783.
- Malterud, K. (2001). Qualitative research: standards, challenges, and guidelines. *The Lancet*, 358(9280), 483–488. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(01\)05627-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(01)05627-6)
- Maulden. (2013). Education and Learning. In Mac Ginty, R. (Ed.). *Routledge Handbook of Peacebuilding* (287-295). London, UK: Routledge Ltd - M.U.A.
- Matyók, T., Senehi, J. & Byrne, S. (2011) *Critical issues in peace and conflict studies: Theory, practice, and pedagogy*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- McHugo, J. (2015) *Syria: A History of the Last Hundred Years*. Retrieved from <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com>
- McKay, J. (2002) The use of social cubism in the analysis of community conflicts. *ILSA Journal of International & Comparative Law*. 8(3), pp. 883-899.
- Mehchi, Z. & Amer, M.D. (2010) General Overview of Migration into, through and from Syria. *The Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration*. Location: Robert Schuman Center for Advanced Studies. European University Institute.
- Mendlovitz, S., & Walker, R. B. J. (1987) *Towards a just world peace: Perspectives from social movements*. London & Boston: Butterworths.
- Merry, S. E. (2006) *Human rights & gender violence: Translating gender violence*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

- Nadia, S.L. (2007) The effect of amnesties before domestic and international tribunals: Morality, law and politics. In E. Hughes, W. Schabas & R.C. Thakur (Eds.). *Atrocities and international accountability: Beyond transitional justice*. New York, NY: United Nations University Press.
- Paffenholz, T. (2010) (Ed.). *Civil Society and Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.
- Paffenholz, T. (2011) Understanding the conflict development nexus and the contribution of development cooperation to peacebuilding. In D J.D. Sandole, S. Byrne, I. Sandole-Staroste, and J. Senehi (Eds.). *Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution* (pp. 170-183). USA and Canada: Routledge.
- Paffenholz, T. (2014) International peacebuilding goes local: analyzing Lederach's conflict transformation theory and its ambivalent encounter with 20 years of practice, *Peacebuilding*, 2(1), pp. 11-27.
- Paul, R.A. (2000) Grassroots mobilization and Diaspora politics: Armenian interest groups and the role of collective memory, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*. 6(1) pp. 24-47.
- Pearson, F. & Olsen Lounsbury, M. (2011) Post-Intervention Stability. In T. Matyók, J. Senehi & S. Byrne. (Eds.) *Critical issues in peace and conflict studies: Theory, practice, and pedagogy*. (pp. 43-60). Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Pearson, A. (2017 December 21) Syria Conflict: What do the US, Russia, Turkey and Iran want? *Deutsche Welle*, Middle East. Retrieved from <https://www.dw.com/en/syria-conflict-what-do-the-us-russia-turkey-and-iran-want/a-41211604>
- Poole, Thiessen, C. (2011) Emancipatory peacebuilding: critical responses to (neo)liberal trends. In T. Matyók, J. Senehi, & S. Byrne (Eds.), *Critical Issues in Peace and Conflict Studies*. (page range) New York, NY: Lexington Books
- Poole, Thom. (2016). Iran and Saudi Arabia's great rivalry explained. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35221569>
- Porter, F. (2016) Embodied Peacebuilding: Reconciliation as Practical Theology. *Practical Theology*. 9(2), pp. 158-159.
- Pugh, M. (2011) Local agency and political economies of peacebuilding. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*. 11(2), pp. 308-320.
- Pugh, M. (2013) The Problem Solving and Critical Paradigm. Mac Ginty, R. (Ed.). *Routledge Handbook of Peacebuilding*. (pp. 11-24) USA & Canada: Routledge Ltd - M.U.A.

- Reimer, L., Schmitz, C., Janke, E., Askerov, A., Strahl, B. & Maytok, T. (2015) *Transformative Change: An Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Reinl, J. (2015 September 30) Syria's war and veto-wielding UN powerplays. *Al Jazeera*, Feature, Human Rights. Retrieved from <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/09/syria-war-veto-wielding-powerplays-150930064603153.html>
- Reychler, L. (2017). Peacemaking, Peacekeeping, and Peacebuilding. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies, Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies.
- Richmond, O. P. (2014) *Failed statebuilding: Intervention, the state, and the dynamics of peace formation*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Rodenhäuser, T. (2012) Human Rights Obligations of Non-State Armed Groups in Other Situations of Violence: The Syria Example. *International Humanitarian Legal Studies* 3, pp. 263-298.
- Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. (1998). Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court: Adopted by the United Nations Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Establishment of an International Criminal Court on 17 July 1998
Entry into force: 1 July 2002, in accordance with article 126. Retrieved from <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/InternationalCriminalCourt.aspx>
- Rosen, A. (2016 February 8) Massive and systematized violence: The UN released a horrifying report on Assad's human-rights abuses. *Business Insider*. Retrieved from <http://www.businessinsider.com/massive-and-systemetized-violence-the-un-just-released-a-horrifying-report-on-assads-human-rights-abuses-2016-2>
- Rothbart, D. & Cherubin, R. (2011) Causation as a core concept in conflict analysis. In D.J.D. Sandole, S.Byrne, I. Sandole-Staroste & J. Senehi (Eds.). *Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution* (pp. 58-70). USA and Canada: Routledge.
- Rothbart, D. & Korostelina, K.V. (2011) The enemy and the innocent in violent conflicts. In D.J.D. Sandole, S. Byrne, Ingrid Sandole-Staroste, and Jessica Senehi (Eds.). *Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution* (pp. 58-70). USA and Canada: Routledge.
- Rothman, J., & Olson, M. (2001) From Interests to Identities: Towards a New Emphasis

- in Interactive Conflict Resolution. *Journal of Peace Research*. 38(3), pp. 289-305.
- RTE (2018 April 11). Russia's 12 UN vetoes on Syria. Retrieved from <https://www.rte.ie/news/world/2018/0411/953637-russia-syria-un-veto/>
- Ryan, S. (2013) The Evolution of Peacebuilding. Mac Ginty, R. (Ed.). *Routledge Handbook of Peacebuilding*. (pp. 25-35) USA & Canada: Routledge Ltd - M.U.A.
- Said, E. (1978) *Orientalism*. London, UK: Routledge & K. Paul.
- Salomon, G., & Cairns, Ed. (2009) *Handbook on peace education*. London: Psychology Press.
- Schmitt, E. (2018 July 6) ISIS May Be Waning, but Global Threats of Terrorism Continue to Spread. *The New York Times*, Middle East. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/06/world/middleeast/isis-global-terrorism.html>
- Security Council Members Voice Concern over Chemical Weapons Use in Syria, Call for Development of New Investigative Mechanism. (2018 January 23) *United Nations*, Meetings Coverage and Press Releases. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sc13174.doc.htm>
- Senehi, J. (2010) Building Peace: Storytelling to Transform Conflicts Constructively. In D. Sandole, S. Byrne, I. Sandole-Staroste & J. Senehi (Eds.). *Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution* (pp. 210-214). Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Simić, Olivera ; Volčič, Zala. (2013). *Transitional Justice and Civil Society in the Balkans* (Springer Series in Transitional Justice). New York, NY: Springer New York.
- Simmons, S.J. (2011) Generativity-based conflict: Maturing microfounding for conflict theory. In D.J.D. Sandole, S. Byrne, I. Sandole-Staroste & J. Senehi (Eds.). *Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution* (pp. 116-124). USA and Canada: Routledge.
- Snyder, A. (2011) Developing Refugee Peacebuilding Capacity: Women in Exile on the Thai/Burmese Border. In Matyók, T., Senehi, J., & Byrne, S. *Critical issues in peace and conflict studies: Theory, practice, and pedagogy*. (pp. 177-198) Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Snyder, A. (2011) Gender relations and conflict transformation among refugee women. In D. J.D. Sandole, S. Byrne, I. Sandole-Staroste & J. Senehi (Eds.). *Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution* (pp. 45-58). USA & Canada: Routledge.
- Stacher, J. (2011) Reinterpreting Authoritarian Power: Syria's Hereditary Succession. *The Middle East Journal*. 65(2), pp. 197-212.

- Statista (2018) Syria's national debt from 2000 to 2010 in relation to the GDP. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/326945/national-debt-of-syria-in-relation-to-gross-domestic-product-gdp/>
- Statista (2018) Syrian Arab Republic Real GDP per capita 2000-2010. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/326873/gross-domestic-product-gdp-per-capita-in-syria/>
- Staub, E. (1999) The Roots of Evil: Social Conditions, Culture, Personality, and Basic Human Needs. *Personality & Social Psychology Review (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates)*. 3(3), pp. 179
- Streeten, P. (1980) Basic needs and human rights. *World Development*. 8(2), pp. 107-111.
- Szablewska, N., & Bachmann, S. (2015) *Current issues in transitional justice* (Vol. 4, Springer Series in Transitional Justice). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Teddle, C. & Yu, F. (2007) Mixed Methods Sampling: A typology with Examples. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*. 1 (1), pp. 77-100.
- The Guardian. (2018). Saudi Arabia and Iran's rivalry is key to Middle East in 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/04/2018-saudi-arabia-iran-rivalry-key-middle-east-year-ahead>
- Thiessen, C. (2011). Emancipatory Peacebuilding: Critical Response to Ne-liberal Trend. 115-140. In A. Matyók, Senehi, J. & Byrne, S. (page range). *Critical issues in peace and conflict studies : Theory, practice, and pedagogy*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- The New York Times. (2018). What's behind Turkey's attack on Syria's Kurds. Accessed on October 28, 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/22/world/middleeast/whats-behind-turkeys-attack-on-syrias-kurds.html>
- Trenin, D. (2018 April 14) The New Cold War is Boiling in Syria. *Foreign Policy, Argument*. Retrieved from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/04/14/the-new-cold-war-is-boiling-over-in-syria/>
- Tuso, H. (2011) Indigenous Conflict Resolution Processes. In Matyók, T., Senehi, J., & Byrne, S. (Eds.). *Critical issues in peace and conflict studies: Theory, practice, and pedagogy* (pp. 245-270). Lanham, MD.: Lexington Books.
- UNHCR (2018) Refugee Situations. [Operational Portal] Retrieved from <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria>

UNHCR. (2018) Syria Emergency. [report] Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/syria-emergency.html?query=number%20of%20Syrian%20refugees%202018>

United Nations. (1948) *Universal declaration of human rights*. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

United Nations General Assembly. (2016) International, Impartial and Independent

Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. [Document] Retrieved from http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/71/L.48

United Nations Human Rights Council. (2016) Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Death in

Detention in the Syrian Arab Republic. Retrieved from http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/CoISyria/A-HRC-31-CRP1_en.pdf

United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. (1977 June 8). Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol 1). Retrieved from <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/ProtocolI.aspx>

United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. (2016 February 22). Almost five years on, Syria is a country destroyed with civilians paying the biggest price: UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria. Retrieved from <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=17078&LangID=E>

United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. (2016 June 16). U.N. Commission of Inquiry on Syria: ISIS is committing genocide against Yazidis. Retrieved from: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=20113&LangID=E>

UN News. (2014 August 27) Syria's brutal war threatens international peace and security, says UN rights panel. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=48571#.WM2pyRiZO1s>

US Department of State. (2010) July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report. Retrieved from https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2010_5/168276.htm

Walsh, D. (2015) How a Human Needs Theory Understanding of Conflict Enhances the

- Use of Consociationalism as a Conflict Resolution Mechanism: The Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland. *Ethnopolitics*. 15(3), pp. 1-18.
- Wanis, A. (2013) Indigenous Peacebuilding. In R. Mac Ginty (Ed.). *Routledge Handbook of Peacebuilding*. (pp. 360-374) London, UK: Routledge Ltd - M.U.A.
- Wielenga, C. (2013) Healing and reconciliation after violent conflict: The role of memory in South Africa and Rwanda. 45(1), pp. 275-231.
- World Bank Data (2017) Syrian Arab Republic. [Online report] Retrieved from <http://data.worldbank.org/country/syrian-arab-republic?view=chart>
- World Bank Data (2018) Syrian Arab Republic GDP. [Online report]. Retrieved from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=SY>
- United Nations (2013) Human Development Report 2013. Retrieved from http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR2013_EN_Summary.pdf.
- Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. (1998). Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court: Adopted by the United Nations Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Establishment of an International Criminal Court on 17 July 1998
Entry into force: 1 July 2002, in accordance with article 126. Retrieved from <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/InternationalCriminalCourt.aspx>
- Global Impact for Migration (2017) Migration and Remittances: Recent development and outlook migration and development brief 28. October, 2017, World Bank. Washington DC.

Appendix 1. The Interview Questions

This study used scripted open-ended questions, as well as non-scripted probing questions. In order to engage participants I used a conversational approach when conducting the interviews. Thus, I did not rigidly follow the numerical order of the questions. The essential questions that serve the research goals are as follows:

1. I would be interested to know about your coming to Canada, can you tell me when did you leave Syria, and come to Canada?

PROBE: Interesting, can you tell me more about that?

PROBE: Can you describe Syria before the protests, and the armed struggle against Assad's regime, and now?

PROBE: Can you provide me with an example of that?

2. How do you feel about what's happening in Syria now?

PROBE: Interesting, can you tell me more about that?

PROBE: What do you think should be done to resolve the conflict in Syria, and reconstruct peace?

PROBE: Can you provide me with an example of that?

3. What do you understand by (1) peacebuilding, and (2) reconciliation?

PROBE: Interesting, can you provide me with an example for that?

4. Do you feel Syria will ever be at "peace"? Why, or why not?

PROBE: What should be done to restore peace in Syria?

PROBE: Interesting, can you provide me with an example of that?

5. What would peaceful Syria look-like and mean to you?

PROBE: Can you provide me with an example of that?

PROBE: What is needed to get there? What constitutes a successful peace resolution?

PROBE: Can you provide me with an example of that?

6. What role did you play, or intend to play to reconstruct peace in Syria, and sustain mutual existence, and mutual respect in your community in Syria?

PROBE: Can you provide me with an example of that?

PROBE: Would you return to your community in Syria? If yes, what are your plans?

PROBE: How would you contribute to peacebuilding in your community in Syria? Do have a plan/ideas to transform relationship and sustain peace in your community?

PROBE: Can you provide me with an example of that?

7. What role do you think external regional and international powers need to play in Syria to transform the conflict and reconstruct sustainable peace?

PROBE: Interesting, can you tell me more about that?

PROBE: Can you provide me with an example of that?

PROBE: What role do you want Canada to play now in the peace talks, and the peacebuilding process in a post peace accord?

8. What are your hopes, and dreams for your future and for Syria's future?

PROBE: Interesting, can you tell me more about that?

PROBE: Can you provide me with an example of that?

9. What are your worst fears, and worries for your future and for Syria's?

PROBE: Interesting, can you tell me more about that?

PROBE: Can you provide me with an example of that?

Appendix 2



Recruitment Letter of Participation in Master's Research Project

To whom it may concern, this letter intends to request your voluntary participation in my Master's thesis research project being conducted through the University of Manitoba. I am a Master's student in the Joint Master's Program in Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Manitoba, St. Paul College, Arthur V. Mauro Centre for Peace and Justice, Winnipeg, Manitoba. My thesis research is a partial requirement for the fulfillment of my Master's degree in Peace and Conflict Studies. My research project entitled, "Syrian Diaspora's Perception and Agency in Peacebuilding and Reconciliation in Syria" aims to explore the Syrian Diaspora's perception of the ethno-political conflict in Syria, as well as the possibilities of transforming it through peaceful processes in the post peace accord phase. This research study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Manitoba's **Joint Faculty Ethics Review Board**. If you have questions about the study, please feel free to contact the Human Ethics Coordinator, via phone at: (204) 474-7122, and/or, email at, humanethics@umanitoba.ca

As you may know the ongoing violent conflict in Syria is complex. Thus, transcending violence, and building peace, and sustaining it in the post-conflict phase will require an inclusive-holistic approach that highly appreciates the involvement of all Syrians inside Syria and abroad in the peace process. Therefore, as a Syrian, your views about the conflict, and approaches to transform it peacefully are tremendously important for researchers in Peace and Conflict Studies, and peacebuilding policy makers.

You may have received this letter from the principal researcher, Nour-Eddine Maghnaoui, or a third party (e.g., a fellow Syrian friend, a relative, a community member, or an employee/volunteer in a local non-profit organization). Please read it carefully, and do not hesitate to contact the principal researcher to seek further information about the study and freely decide to accept, or decline the invitation to participate in this study. If you receive this letter from a third party, do not disclose your initial or final decision about accepting, or declining the invitation. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Therefore, please remain discreet about your decision, and contact the primary researcher to express your decision. Please do not feel compelled, or coerced by the recommender to accept, or decline the invitation to participate in this study. However, if you experienced coercion from a third party to participate, do not hesitate to report it to the principal researcher, and/or the Human Ethics Coordinator via phone, or email. If you contact the researcher to inquire about the study, or express your decision, he will neither ask you to reveal the name of the recommender, nor ask you to justify your decision if you decline the invitation.

Research procedure

If you agree to participate in this research, the principal researcher will coordinate with you via phone, and/or email to designate the most convenient time and location for you to further explain to you the goal of the study, its risks and benefits, your rights as participant, and his ethical research obligations. The researcher will also provide you with a copy of the informed consent form, and respond to all your questions and concerns that relate to the study. Your participation would involve a 90-minute audio-recorded interview. Interviews will be conducted in a safe, and private location face-to-face on an individual basis. You will be asked questions concerning your perceptions of the ongoing conflict in Syria, as well as your views and approaches to transform it peacefully, with emphasis on your personal views and approaches to transcend violence, reconstruct peace, and sustain it in the post-conflict phase. If you feel that the interview questions are upsetting, or making you uncomfortable, you are free to skip the question, request to stop the interview or completely withdraw from the study.

All information about you and your answers to the interview questions will be kept strictly confidential. The data collected through this study will be kept in my password-encrypted computer, and locked cabinet file, whereas, no one whatsoever will have access to it without a written consent from you. Nonetheless, my research supervisor, Dr. Sean Byrne, and the University of Manitoba's Research Ethics Board may need to access the research records to ensure that the research process was done accordingly to the academic and research ethics standards. If you are concerned about confidentiality and anonymity, you may choose pseudonyms to protect your identity. The final draft of the thesis, and any report or publication resulting from this study will not include your name, or any information that may refer to your identity, or use any statement that you do not feel comfortable to make public.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Thus, you uphold the right to withdraw from the study at anytime you may wish, before the interview, during, or after the interview, for any reason, and without explanation. Nonetheless, if you choose to withdraw from the study, you must inform the principal researcher either by email, or phone. Thereby, he will destroy all information you provided within 24 hours of receiving your request, and never use any information that may refer to your personal identity. However, once, the final draft of the thesis is submitted to the Thesis Advisory Committee for the oral exam, and the Faculty of Graduate Studies at the University of Manitoba, you will not be able to request to withdraw from the study.

For all other questions, or if you would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please feel free to contact the principal researcher, Nour-Eddine Maghnaoui via phone at (...), or email (...)_and/or research supervisor. Dr. Sean Byrne, phone at (...), or Email: (...)

I would like to thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Appendix 3



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

دعوة للمشاركة في دراسة أكاديمية لنيل شهادة الماجستير

إلى كل من يهيمه الأمر، هذه الرسالة تلتزم مشاركتك الطوعية في مشروع التخرج لنيل شهادة الماجستير من جامعة مانيتوبا. إسمي نورالدين مغناوي، أتابع دراستي الجامعية بسلك الماجستير تخصص دراسات السلام و المنازعات بمركز آرثر مورو للسلام و العدالة بمعهد سان بول بجامعة مانيتوبا بمدينة وينبيغ الكندية بولاية مانيتوبا. هذه الدراسة هي أطروحة مشروع تخرجي لنيل شهادة الماجستير، و عنوانها "رؤية الجالية السورية و دورها في عملية بناء السلام و المصالحة الوطنية في سوريا". الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو فهم النزاع القائم في سوريا، مع التركيز على إمكانية إنهاءه بالطرق السلمية، و إطلاق عملية المصالحة الوطنية و إعادة بناء السلم الأهلي. بصيغة أخرى، الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو إستقصاء رؤية الجالية السورية حول مشروع المصالحة و بناء السلام في سوريا، و عن دورها في تحديد ملامح و آليات ذلك المشروع و إنزاله على أرض الواقع.

لقد تم التدقيق و المصادقة على هذه الدراسة من طرف المجلس المشترك المكلف بأداب البحث العلمي التابع لجامعة مانيتوبا، **University of Manitoba's Joint Faculty Ethics Review Board**. إذا كان لديك أي أسئلة حول هذه الدراسة، فلا تتردد بالإتصال بالموظف المسؤول عن التدقيق في إحترام قواعد البحث العلمي التابع لجامعة مانيتوبا عن طريق الهاتف: (204) 474-7122

أو البريد الإلكتروني: humanethics@umanitoba.ca
<mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca>

كما تعلم النزاع القائم في سوريا مركب، و المسببات التي أدت إلى إندلاعه و تأزمه متعددة و جد متشابكة. لذلك، إنهاء النزاع المسلح، إعادة بناء السلم الأهلي، و الحفاظ على ديمومته يستوجب إعتقاد مقارنة شمولية-تشاركية تستوعب كل السوريين داخل سوريا و خارجها. و بالتالي، كونك مواطناً سورياً، فأريك حول الصراع في سوريا، و مقاربتك الشخصية لإنهائه و تحقيق السلام الدائم هي بالغة الأهمية للباحثين في دراسات السلم و النزاعات، و صانعي القرار المتخصصين في أورش إعادة بناء السلام.

ربما تكون قد حصلت على هذه الدعوة من الباحث الرئيسي في هذه الدراسة، نورالدين مغناوي، أو من شخص آخر كأحد أفراد الجالية السورية في مدينة نانايمو، أو مدينة فيكتوريا، أو صديقك، أو أحد أقاربك، أو أحد العاملين أو المتطوعين في منظمة محلية مدنية أو دينية تدعم الجالية السورية في مدينة نانايمو، أو مدينة فيكتوريا. قم بقراءتها بتمعن. و لا تتردد في الإتصال بالباحث لتستفسر بالشكل الكافي عن الدراسة، و تعبر عن رأيك بكل حرية بقبول دعوة المشاركة، أو رفضها. إذا توصلت بدعوة المشاركة بشخص آخر غير الباحث الرئيسي في هذه الدراسة، فلا تقم بالتصريح بقرار مشاركتك في الدراسة سواء أكان بالإيجاب، أم بالسلب. مشاركتك في هذه الدراسة طوعية، لذلك، فلك الحرية الكاملة بقبول دعوة المشاركة، أو رفضها. لكن، إذا شعرت بالإكراه و الضغط لقبول دعوة المشاركة، أو رفضها، فلا تتردد بإخبار الباحث، و المنسق المسؤول عن آداب البحث العلمي التابع لجامعة مانيتوبا. إذا إتصلت بالباحث للإستفسار حول الدراسة و إخباره بقرار مشاركتك في الدراسة، فلن يسألك عن إسم و هوية الشخص الذي أحالك، ولن يطلب منك تحليل قرارك برفض المشاركة.

منهجية البحث

إذا وافقت على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة، سيقوم الباحث الرئيسي بالإتصال بك بالهاتف، أو عن طريق البريد الإلكتروني للتنسيق معك لإختيار الزمان و المكان المناسبين لك ليشرح لك بالشكل الكافي الهدف من الدراسة، و مخاطرها و منافعها، و يشرح لك حقوقك كمشارك، إنتزاماته العلمية و الأخلاقية، و يعطيك نسخة من التصريح بالمشاركة الطوعية باللغة العربية و الإنجليزية، و يجب عن كل أسئلتك و إستفساراتك التي تتعلق بمشاركتك في هذه

الدراسة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، سأتصل بك، لأنسق معك بشكل مسبق لإختيار الوقت و المكان المناسبين لك، و الذين يحققان لك شرط الخصوصية و الأمان للقيام بمحادثة/مقابلة لمدة ساعة و نصف سأسألك خلالها عن أرائك حول الصراع القائم في سوريا، و مقاربتك الشخصية لإنهاء النزاع، و رؤيتك حول المصالحة و عملية بناء السلام في سوريا، إذا شعرت أن الأسئلة تبعث في نفسك الإحساس الحزن و الأسى، فإمكانك الإجابة على السؤال بالقدر الذي تريد، أو تقوم بتفادي الإجابة على السؤال، أو أن تطلب إنهاء المحادثة فوراً، أو أن تطلب الإنسحاب من الدراسة ككل. إذا قررت الإنسحاب من الدراسة خلال المقابلة، سيتم إلغاء كل المعلومات المتعلقة بك من الدراسة فوراً.

كل المعلومات المتعلقة بمشاركتك في هذه الدراسة سيتم خفضها في كمبيوتر خاص مزود بشفرة سرية للإستعمال، و في صندوق خاص مزود بشفرة سرية بفتحه. ولن يتم مشاركتها مع أي شخص، أو جهة، دون إذن كتابي منك. الأستاذ المشرف على هذه الدراسة، الدكتور شون بيرن، وجامعة مانيتوبا لهما الحق بالإطلاع على كل البيانات المتعلقة بالدراسة للتأكد من أن الدراسة إحتزمت مبادئ و أخلاقيات البحث العلمي. بإمكانك إستعمال إسم مستعار عند المشاركة في الدراسة، و بالتالي، لن يتمكن أي شخص من معرفة هويتك. نتائج هذه الدراسة لن تتضمن إسمك أو معلوماتك الشخصية التي قد تدل على هويتك.

مشاركتك في هذه الدراسة طوعية، و بالتالي من حقك الإنسحاب في أي وقت تشاء و بدون تعليل. للإنسحاب من الدراسة، عليك إخبار الباحث شخصياً، أو عن طريق الهاتف، أو عن طريق رسالة هاتفية نصية، أو إيميل باللغة العربية أو الأنجليزية، و نتيجة لذلك، سيتم حذف و إلغاء كل البيانات المتعلقة بك من الدراسة، و لن يتم إخبار أي شخص بقرارك. لكنه، إذا قام الباحث بإنهاء كتابة الدراسة و إرسال النسخة الأخيرة من الأطروحة إلى اللجنة العلمية لإجتياز الإمتحان الشفوي، و كلية التعليم العالي بجامعة مانيتوبا، فلن يكون بإمكانك أن تنسحب من الدراسة. إذا كان لديك أي أسئلة بخصوص هذه الدراسة، و أردت الحصول على المزيد من المعلومات لإتخاذ قرارك، فلا تتردد بالإتصال بالباحث الرئيسي، نورالدين مغناوي، على الرقم الهاتفي:

أو البريد الإلكتروني:

Appendix 4



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

Informed Consent Form for Human Subject Research Participation

Research title: Syrian Diaspora's Perception and Agency in Peacebuilding and Reconciliation

Principle Researcher

Nour-Eddine Maghnaoui
Joint Master's Program of Peace and Conflict studies
University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB.

Student Supervisor

Dr. Sean Byrne
Department of Peace and Conflict Studies
University of Manitoba, St. Paul College.
Arthur V. Mauro Centre for Peace and
Justice. Winnipeg, MB.

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Please take your time to review this consent form and discuss any questions you may have with the principal researcher, Nour-Eddine Maghnaoui. You may take your time to make your decision about participating in this study and you may discuss it with your friends, family or (if applicable) your doctor before you make your decision. This consent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask the principal researcher to explain any words or information that you do not clearly understand.

Purpose of the study

This research study aims to investigate the protracted violent conflict in Syria, with emphasis on the possibility of transforming it peacefully based on the Syrian Diaspora's perception and agency in peacebuilding and reconciliation.

Participants Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a member of the Syrian Diaspora on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada. As a Syrian, your views about the ongoing conflict, and your vision and participation in the peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts are vital, because building a sustainable peace in Syria will require an inclusive-holistic peacebuilding approach that reflects the views and hopes of mainstream Syrians. This study aims to recruit a total of ten members of the Syrian Diaspora that represent some sub-categories of the Syrian society. You may have received the invitation to participate in this study from the principal researcher, Nour-Eddine Maghnaoui, or a third party (e.g., a fellow Syrian, a friend, a relative, a member of the community, an employee/volunteer in a local non-profit organization). If you have received the recruitment letter from a third party, and accepted to participate in the study,

the principal researcher will not ask you to reveal the name of the person who referred/recommended you, and will not reveal your identity to other participants. Moreover, your initial contact with the primary researcher to inquire about the study does not compel you to accept to participate in the study. Whether you decline, or accept to participate in this the study, the principal researcher will guarantee you confidentiality and anonymity within your community, and will not use any indications that may lead to your identity.

Study procedures

The method of data collection for this study will be individual interviews with 10 members of the Syrian Diaspora, particularly, refugees who arrived to Canada in the last two years. Your participation in this research is completely voluntary, and you have the option of participating anonymously by choosing a pseudonym. If you choose to participate anonymously, the principal researcher is committed to not share your true identity with any person without a written consent from you; in fact, you will be called and referred to by your self-chosen pseudonym. You will be asked to complete a one session of 90-minute face-to-face interview with the principal researcher. Prior to the interview, the principal researcher will coordinate with you to choose the most convenient time, and safest location for you to conduct the interview. The principal researcher will conduct the interview alone and ask you questions concerning your perceptions of the ongoing conflict in Syria as well as your views and approaches to transform it peacefully, with emphasis on, your views and approaches of peacebuilding and reconciliation processes. Also, during the interview, the principal researcher will be writing notes in the form of comments, general observations, and themes that emerge from the interview. If you feel uncomfortable with note-taking, please feel free to express your concerns, and seek clarification about the purpose of that activity.

With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded, and the audio-tapes will be transcribed into text by the principal researcher, Nour-Eddine Maghnaoui, to ensure confidentiality and accurate reporting of the information that you provide. Electronic data will be stored on a password-protected computer from the beginning of data insertion till data removal/destruction by December 30, 2018. However, the signed consent forms, the audio-tapes, and the interview observational notes will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the principal researcher's home of residence. All research data will be destroyed with the permission of the research supervisor, Dr. Sean Byrne at the end of the project by December 30, 2018.

Within maximum of 4 weeks of the interview, the principal researcher will contact you to provide you with a copy of the interview transcription in order to allow you to correct any inaccuracies, and identify any information that you feel could compromise your anonymity. The ultimate goal of enabling you to review the interview transcription is not to do an extensive word-for-word cross-verification, but to construct a version of the interview that you feel safe and comfortable making public. You can ask the principal researcher to make changes in the transcription for any reason you want such as correcting something he transcribed incorrectly, correcting something you said incorrectly, deleting something you wish if you had not said, and removing/changing a detail that you think could let a reader identify you, etc.

Risks and Discomforts

There are no anticipated physical risks to participants. However, the research questions in this study might pose minimal risks to the participants who incurred traumatic experiences throughout their displacement journey within Syria. If you find that talking about the conflict in Syria to be upsetting, or emotional, you do not have to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable, or that you find too upsetting. Moreover, if you feel upset, or uncomfortable during the interview, ask the interviewer to stop the interview immediately and drive you to a health clinic to seek assistance if needed. Furthermore, you can ask to withdraw from the study.

The principal researcher does not have counseling credentials. Thus, this form contains the location and phone numbers of multiple counseling clinics and resources based in Nanaimo, and Victoria, BC that can assist individuals who are experiencing trauma. If you need help during, or after the interview the principal researcher is committed to drive you to a public health clinic.

There is a minimal potential risk that the identity of participants could be compromised. Therefore, you may choose to participate anonymously in this study using pseudonyms when you sign the consent form. Further, the principal researcher will provide you with a copy of the interview transcription to give you the opportunity to identify any detail that could compromise your identity, and request changes that makes you safe and satisfied. The rationale of conducting the research in two communities, Nanaimo, and Victoria, is to enhance the anonymity of participants through diversion. The final draft of the thesis, and academic articles and presentations that will stem from the research will contain the participants' quotes. However, there will be no information that leads to the participants' city of residence.

This study uses snowball sampling; thus, there is a minimal potential risk to the anonymity of both recommender and recommended participant. Therefore, if you receive the recruitment letter from someone else other than the principal researcher, such as a fellow Syrian friend, a relative, a community member, an employee/volunteer in a local non-profit organization, please remain discreet, and do not share your decision with others in order to avoid coercion, and peer pressure. Your participation in this research study is voluntary. Therefore, feel free to accept, or decline to participate. However, if you experienced coercion from a third party to participate in the study, do not hesitate to report it to the principal researcher, and/or the Human Ethics Coordinator via phone, or email.

Benefits

Participants in this study will not receive material/monetary rewards for their participation. However, they will have the opportunity to share their experiences, concerns and needs, as well as to express their ideas and views about the conflict and ways of transforming it peacefully. The study focuses primarily on the future, as it seeks to explore the study participants' aspirations, and plans to be part of the peacebuilding processes to transcend violence, and build sustainable peace.

Costs

There is no cost to you for participating in this study.

Payment for participation

You will receive no payment or reimbursement for any expenses related to taking part in this study. Nonetheless, during the interview session, the principal researcher may provide some snacks and beverages.

Confidentiality

All records of your participation in this study will be kept strictly confidential. Your name and all information that may lead to your identity will not be used at all in the study records. All electronic data will be stored on the principal researcher's password-protected portable computer. However, the signed consent forms, the interview audio-tapes, and paper copies of the interview observational notes will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home. If you choose to participate anonymously in this study, your name will not be used at all in the study records; only pseudonyms and non-identifiable information will be used for the discussion, dissemination, and publication of the data. Also, if you choose to receive a summary of the results of the study, your name and address will be kept in a secure file.

At the dissemination stage of the results of this study in articles, conferences, and meetings, you will not be identified by your real name, but by your pseudonym. Your responses will be presented in the form of aggregate themes to highlight particular findings. Nonetheless, in order to ensure that the principal researcher has adhered to the Canadian academic and ethical research standards, the research supervisor, Dr. Sean Byrne, and the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba may need to look at the research records. Notwithstanding, it is important to note that Dr. Sean Byrne, and Research Ethics Board have a professional obligation to protect your privacy.

In case of electronic transmission of the research data between the principal researcher, and research supervisor in one hand, and between the principal researcher and Research Ethics Board for monitoring or auditing purposes on other hand, data records will not include your name, telephone, and addresses. All data that relate to this study; particularly, the participants' information will be destroyed with the permission of research supervisor, Dr. Sean Byrne at the end of the project by December 30, 2018.

The results of this study will be presented in my Master's thesis for partial completion of my Joint Master's Program in Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Manitoba. Upon the successful defense of my thesis, during an oral examination at the University of Manitoba, before the Thesis Advisory Committee members, Dr. Sean Byrne (committee Chair), and Advisory Committee Members: Dr. Dean Peachy and Dr. Michelle Gallant, a copy of my thesis will be publically available on the University of Manitoba's webpage (approximately December 30, 2018) at:

https://mspace.lib.umanitoba.ca/discover?scope=%2F&query=PEACE+AND+CONFLICT+&submit=Go&filtertype_0=dateIssued&filter_0=%5B2000+TO+2017%5D&filter_relational_operator_0=equals

Permission to Quote:

The study findings of this study may also be presented in conferences' presentations, and published in scholarly journals. Thus, the principal researcher may wish to quote your

own words in reports and publications. Please check yes or no for each of the following statements:

Researchers may publish documents that contain quotations by me under the following conditions:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	I agree to be quoted directly (my name is used).
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	I agree to be quoted directly if my name is not published (I remain anonymous).
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	I agree to be quoted directly if a made-up name (pseudonym) is used.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal from the Study

Participation in this research study is voluntary; hence, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without explanation. As a consequence, you will be guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity, and all data that relates to you will be destroyed within 24 hours of reporting your decision to the primary researcher either in person, by phone, text message, or email in English or Arabic. However, once the final draft of the thesis is submitted to the Thesis Advisory Committee for the oral exam, and the Faculty of Graduate Studies at the University of Manitoba, you will not be able to request to withdraw from the study.

Questions

You are free to ask questions that you may have about your participation in this study. If any questions, or concerns come up during or after the study, contact the principal research at (...), and/or email, (...), and/or research supervisor, Dr. Sean Byrne via phone: (...), Email:

For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact The University of Manitoba, Bannatyne Campus Research Ethics Board Office at: (204) 789-3389, and/or email at: humanethics@umanitoba.ca

Statement of Consent

I have read this consent form. I have had the opportunity to discuss this research study with the principal researcher Nour-Eddine Maghnaoui. I have had my questions answered by him in the language that I understand. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I believe that I have not been unduly influenced by any study team member to participate in the research study by any statements or implied statements. Any relationship (such as employer, supervisor or family member) I may have with the study team has not affected my decision to participate. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form after signing it. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may choose to withdraw at any time. I freely agree to participate in this research study.

I understand that information regarding my personal identity will be kept confidential, but that confidentiality is not guaranteed. I authorize the inspection of any of my records that relate to this study by The University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board for quality assurance purposes.

By signing this consent form, I have not waived any of the legal rights that I have as a participant in a research study.

Please answer the following questions with a check mark in the YES or NO box:

Do you consent to the interview being audio recorded? YES NO

Do you consent to being identified by name in the dissemination and publication of the research findings? YES NO

Do you wish to receive a summary of the findings and be notified of future publications based on the study? YES NO

If YES, please provide your phone number, and/or email address.....
.....

Participant Name _____ Participant Signature _____

I, Nour-Eddine Maghnaoui, affirm to adhere to the procedures described in this consent form.

Principal researcher: Signature _____ Date _____

Mental health resources in Victoria

1. **Men's Trauma Centre**

Counselling, education, and linkage to other agency services, for adult and late adolescent males and their partners, who are survivors of physical, emotional or sexual trauma.

There is a fee, but clients can apply for funding

#100-3060 Cedar Hill Road

Telephone: (250) 381-6367, (250) 381-0493 <http://www.menstrauma.com/>

2. **Salvation Army – Counseling Services**

Individual counseling, life skills training, support groups and practical guidance.

No cost

2695 Quadra Street. Telephone: 250-386-8521

3. **Women's Sexual Assault Centre (VWSAC)**

One-to-one, and groups for women dealing with current/past abuse

No cost.

#511-620 View Street, V8W 1J6 Telephone: (250) 383-3232, (250) 383-5545.

Fax: (250) 383-6112 <http://www.vwsac.com/>

Mental health resources in Nanaimo

1. **Acute/Crisis Services**

VI Crisis Line/Community Crisis Response Team
(24 hour service) Tel: 1-888-494-3888

2. **Nanaimo Mental Health & Addiction Services**

Access Services— Monday to Friday

203-2000 Island Highway North

Brooks Landing Mall Tel: 250-739-5710

Walk-In Counselling Clinic 10:00 am to 7:00 pm

No appointment necessary

3. **Haven: A Society for Women and Children Community Service Building**

2270 Labieux Road

24 Hour Crisis Line: 250-756-0616

Business Line: 250-756-2452

Appendix 5



UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

تصريح بالموافقة الطوعية للمشاركة في دراسة أكاديمية حول "رؤية الجالية السورية و دورها في عملية بناء السلام و المصالحة في سوريا"

إسم الباحث: نورالدين مغناوي

البريد الإلكتروني:

رقم الهاتف:

إسم الأستاذ المشرف على البحث: شون بيرن Sean Byrne

البريد الإلكتروني:

رقم الهاتف:

لقد تم التماس مشاركتك في هذه الدراسة الأكاديمية، لذلك من فضلك خذ الوقت الكافي لقراءة و مراجعة هذه الوثيقة و مناقشة أي أسئلة لديك مع الباحث نورالدين مغناوي و إتخاذ قرارك حول المشاركة في هذه الدراسة. بإمكانك مناقشة مشاركتك مع أصدقائك، أفراد عائلتك، أو طبيبك (إذا إستلزم الأمر) قبل إتخاذ قرار مشاركتك. هذه الوثيقة قد تحتوي على كلمات يصعب عليك فهم معانيها، لذلك، من فضلك أطلب من الباحث أن يشرح لك أي كلمات أو معلومات يصعب عليك فهمها.

الهدف من الدراسة

هذ الدراسة الأكاديمية تهدف لدراسة و تحليل الصراع القائم في سوريا، مع التركيز على إمكانية حل الأزمة بالطرق السلمية بناءً على رؤية و مقارنة الجالية السورية في الخارج لمفهوم المصالحة الوطنية وإعادة بناء السلام الأهلي.

آلية إختيار المشاركين

لقد تم التماس مشاركتك في هذه الدراسة كونك أحد أفراد الجالية السورية المقيمة في جزيرة فانكوفر، بولاية بريتيش كولومبيا. كونك سوريا، فأريك حول الصراع القائم في سوريا، و رؤيتك و مشاركتك في أي مشروع للمصالحة الوطنية و إعادة بناء السلم الأهلي في سوريا مهم جداً، لأن إعادة بناء السلم الأهلي الدائم في سوريا يستلزم إتباع مقاربة شمولية تشاركية تعكس آراء و آمال كل مكونات المجتمع السوري. هذه الدراسة تسعى إلى إيجاد عشرة متطوعين من الجالية السورية الذين يمثلون التركيبة الإجتماعية المتنوعة للمجتمع السوري. ربما تكون قد توصلت بدعوة المشاركة في هذه الدراسة من الباحث في هذه الدراسة، نورالدين مغناوي، أو من شخص آخر كأحد أفراد الجالية السورية في نانايمو، أو صديقك، أحد أقاربك، أو أحد العاملين أو المتطوعين في منظمة محلية تدعم الجالية السورية. إذا توصلت بدعوة المشاركة من طرف ثالث غير الباحث الرئيسي وعبرت عن رغبتك في المشاركة الطوعية في هذه الدراسة، فلن يتم سؤالك عن هوية الشخص الذي أوصاك بالمشاركة، و لن يتم إخبار المشاركين الآخرين بهويتك، أو بقرار مشاركتك. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، إتصالك بالباحث للإستفسار حول الدراسة لا يلزمك بالمشاركة فيها. سواء كان قرارك بالمشاركة بالفرض أم بالإيجاب، فإن الباحث يتعهد بالحفاظ على خصوصيتك و المعلومات الخاصة بك، و لن يقوم بنشر أي تفاصيل خاصة بك قد تشير إلى هويتك.

المرحلة العملية في الدراسة

المنهج العلمي المتبع لجمع البيانات في هذه الدراسة هو المقابلة الفردية مع عشرة أشخاص من الجالية السورية، خصوصاً اللاجئين الذين وصلوا إلى كندا في السنتين الأخيرتين. مشاركتك في هذه الدراسة طوعية، و بالتالي، فمن حقك أن تختار اسماً مستعاراً كي تبقى هويتك مجهولة للآخرين. إذا وافقت على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة بإسم

مستعار فإن الباحث يلتزم بعدم مشاركة البيانات الخاصة بك مع أي شخص كان دون إذن مكتوب منك، وسيتم إستعمال الإسم المستعار الذي إخترت للإشارة إليك. لتحديد وقت ومكان المقابلة سيصل بك الباحث شخصياً لتحديد المكان و الزمان المناسبين لك، و سنتستغرق المقابلة حوالي ساعة و نصف من وقتك، و سيطرح عليك مجموعة من الأسئلة المفتوحة حول الحرب الأهلية في سوريا، و عن مقاربتك الشخصية لإنهاء الصراع و تحقيق شروط المصالحة الوطنية و إعادة بناء السلم الأهلي في سوريا. أيضاً، خلال المقابلة سيقوم الباحث بكتابة ملاحظات عامة حول المقابلة و سيرها، فإذا كان لديك ملاحظة أو إعتراض على تلك المسألة فلا تتردد في إيضاحها خلال المقابلة. إذا وافقت على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة سيتم تسجيل محتوى المقابلة الصوتية، و في وقت لاحق سيقوم الباحث بكتابة مضمون إجابتك الصوتية، و خلال أجل أقصاه أربعة أسابيع يلتزم الباحث بإعطائك نسخة مكتوبة لمضمون إجابتك خلال المقابلة من أجل ضمان إحترام الخصوصية ودقة المعلومات. مضمون المقابلة الصوتي و الكتابي سيتم تخزينهما في كمبيوتر الباحث الشخصي المزود بشفرة خاصة للإستعمال. كل البيانات الإلكترونية الخاصة بالدراسة سيتم تخزينها في كمبيوتر خاص مزود بشفرة خاصة لولوجه من بداية إدخال المعلومات إلى تاريخ إلغاءها في 30 دجنبر 2018. بينما سيتم الإحتفاظ بالشرائط التيسجيلية للمقابلة، و تصاريح الموافقة على المشاركة في الدراسة، و دفتر الملاحظات الخاص بالمقابلة في صندوق خاص مزود بشفرة سرية للإستعمال سيتم الإحتفاظ به في محل إقامة الباحث. تجدر الإشارة إلى أنه سيتم إلغاء كل البيانات الخاصة بك و تلك المتعلقة بالدراسة بعد الحصول على إذن الأستاذ المشرف على البحث، البروفسور شون بيرن في 30 دجنبر 2018.

و خلال أجل أقصاه أربعة أسابيع، سيقوم الباحث بإعطائك نسخة مكتوبة لمضمون المقابلة الصوتية، لكي يتسنى لك تصحيح أي مغالطات، و تحديد أي معلومات قد تعتقد أنها قد تحدد هويتك. الهدف الرئيسي من إعطائك نسخة مكتوبة لمضمون المحادثة الصوتية ليس القيام بالتدقيق الحرفي لكل كلمة، ولكن، لإعطائك الفرصة للإطلاع و إقرار صيغة لمضمون المحادثة ترضى عنها و تشعرك بالأمان عند نشرها. بإمكانك أن تطلب من الباحث أن يقوم بإدخال تعديلات على مضمون المحادثة لأي سبب تريد، كتصحيح شيء مغلوط في المحادثة، أو تصحيح شيء ما قلت خلال المحادثة، أو حذف شيء ما كان يجب عليك قوله خلال المحادثة، أو تعديل وتغيير معلومة أو حثية تعتقد أنها قد تساعد القارئ على تحديد هويتك. إلخ،

المخاطر المُحتملة للدراسة

ليس هناك أي مخاطر جسدية متوقعة على المتطوعين المشاركين في هذه الدراسة، لكن، هناك إحتمال أن تذكرك المشاركة في هذه الدراسة بتجارب قاسية/صعبة خلال إقامتك أو مغادرتك لبلدك سوريا، لذلك، إذا كان الحديث عن الصراع الدائر في سوريا يشعرك بالحزن و عدم الراحة، فبإمكانك الإجابة عن الأسئلة بالطريقة التي تريحك و بالقدر الذي تريد، كما أنه بإمكانك أن تتفادى الإجابة عن السؤال الذي لا تريد ككل. الإضافة إلى ذلك، إذا أحسست خلال المقابلة بالحزن و عدم الراحة، فبإمكانك أن تطلب إنهاء المقابلة بشكل فوري. هذه الوثيقة تحتوي على عناوين عيادات طبية بمدينة نانايمو وفينكتوريا توفر الدعم النفسي و الطبي. إذا أحسست في أي مرحلة من مراحل المقابلة بعدم الراحة، و بحاجة للرعاية الطبية، فبإمكانك أن تطلب من الباحث إيصالك إلى أحد تلك العيادات. هناك إحتمال ضعيف أن يتم التعرف على هوية المشاركين في هذه الدراسة، لذلك بإمكانك أن تختار إسماً مستعاراً. كما أن الباحث سيزودك بنسخة مكتوبة لمضمون المقابلة لكي تتاح لك الفرصة لتحديد أي معلومات قد تحدد هويتك. و من تم تقوم بإدخال التعديلات اللازمة التي تشعرك بالرضى و الأمان. نصف المشاركين في هذه الدراسة سيكون من عدة مدن في جزيرة فانكوفر، بولاية بريتيش كولومبيا. و بالتالي، لن يكون بإمكان القارئ تحديد هوية المشاركين، كما أنه عند نشر نتائج الرسالة في رسالة التخرج للماجستير، و المقالات العلمية، و المؤتمرات العلمية، لن يتم تحديد مكان سكني المشاركين.

هذه الدراسة تعتمد منهجية الإحالة في البحث عن المشاركين، لذلك هناك إحتمال أن يتم الضغط على المحال و إكراهه على المشاركة من طرف المحيل. مشاركتك في هذه الدراسة طوعية، لذلك، إذا تعرضت للضغط و الإكراه من أي طرف لقبول دعوة المشاركة في هذه الدراسة أو رفضها، فلا تتردد في الإتصال بالباحث الرئيسي، و المسؤول في جامعة مانيتوبا عن قواعد البحث العلمي. المعلومات الخاصة بالباحث و المجلس التابع لجامعة مانيتوبا للبحث العلمي موجودة أدناه.

المنافع المرجوة من الدراسة

المشاركة في هذه الدراسة لن تعود بأي مقابل مادي على المشاركين، إلا أنها ستوفر لهم الفرصة للتعبير عن وجهة نظرهم حول مآلات النزاع في سوريا و مناقشة السبل و الآليات الكفيلة بإنهاء النزاع و تحقيق شروط المصالحة و السلام الدائم و العادل في سوريا.

التكاليف

ليس عليك دفع أي تكاليف مادية إذا شاركت في هذه الدراسة.

مكافأة المشاركة في الدراسة

لن تحصل على أي مقابل مادي في حال مشاركتك في هذه الدراسة، لكن خلال المقابلة، سيقوم الباحث بتوفير بعض المشروبات و المأكولات الخفيفة.

الخصوصية و السرية

كل البيانات المتعلقة بمشاركتك في هذه الدراسة سيتم حمايتها، و لن يتم مشاركتها مع شخص دون إذن كتابي منك. كل البيانات المتعلقة بالدراسة سيتم حفظها في كمبيوتر خاص مزود بشفرة سرية للإستعمال. بينما سيتم الإحتفاظ بشرائط المقابلة و تصريح الموافقة على المشاركة في الدراسة، و دفتر الملاحظات الخاص بالمقابلة في صندوق مزود بشفرة سرية لفتحها سيتم الإحتفاظ به في بيت الباحث. إذا إستعملت إسماً مستعاراً، فلن يتم تسجيل إسمك البتة في بيانات الدراسة، و سيتم إستعمال إسمك المستعار عند نشر نتائج الدراسة. إجاباتك خلال المقابلة سيتم نشرها بشكل عام للتدليل على نقطة معينة دون كتابة إسمك الحقيقي، أو أي معلومات قد تساعد القارئ على تحديد هويتك. و إحتراماً لقواعد الخصوصية و السرية، و عملاً بقواعد البحث العلمي في كندا فلن يكون بإمكان أي شخص أن يحصل على مضمون التسجيلات أو الملاحظات التي أكتبها خلال المقابلة، بإستثناء الأستاذ المشرف على الدراسة، البروفيسور شون بيرن Sean Byrne. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، جامعة مانيتوبا تحتفظ بحق الإطلاع على مجريات الدراسة للتأكد أن الباحث نورالدين مغناوي قام بالدراسة وفقاً للقواعد الأكاديمية و الأخلاقية المعمول بها في كندا و التي تضمن حماية سلامة و خصوصية الأشخاص المشاركين في الدراسات العلمية. إذا تم إرسال البيانات المتعلقة بالدراسة للبروفيسور شون بيرن، أو جامعة مانيتوبا عن طريق البريد الإلكتروني، فلن يتم كتابة البيانات الشخصية الخاصة بك كإسمك، و عنوانك، ورقم هاتفك.

نتائج هذا البحث سيتم تقديمها في مشروع أطروحة التخرج من الماجستير من جامعة مانيتوبا. بعد النجاح في تقديم نتائج الدراسة في إمتحان شفوي أمام لجنة علمية جامعية من جامعة مانيتوبا تضم البروفيسور شون بيرن، و البروفيسور دين بيتشي، و البروفيسورة ميشيل كالانت ستكون نتائج الدراسة متوفرة بشكل عام لطلاب جامعة مانيتوبا بكندا في دائرة البيانات التابعة للجامعة التي تنشر رسائل و أطروحات الماجستير و الدكتوراة الخاصة بالطلبة المنتسبين للجامعة على الرابط التالي:

https://mspace.lib.umanitoba.ca/discover?scope=%2F&query=PEACE+AND+CONFLICT+&submit=Go&filtertype_0=dateIssued&filter_0=%5B2000+TO+2017%5D&filter_relatational_operator_0>equals

بالإضافة إلى ذلك، نتائج الدراسة ستكون كمنطلق لكتابة مقالات أكاديمية و تقديم محاضرات في المؤتمرات.

الموافقة على الإقتباس:

نتائج هذه الدراسة سيتم نشرها في أطروحة التخرج، و المقالات العلمية، و المؤتمرات، لذلك، يلتزم الباحث منك أن تعطيه حق إقتباس كلماتك و إجاباتك خلال المقابلة. من فضلك إختار نعم أو لا من بين الإختيارات الواردة أدناه:

بإمكان الباحث إقتباس ما قلت خلال المقابلة و نشره طبقاً للشروط الواردة أدناه:

أوافق أن يتم إقتباس كلماتي كما هي و إستعمال إسمي؟

نعم:

لا:

أوافق أن يتم إقتباس كلماتي كما هي إذا لم يتم نشر إسمي الحقيقي (وبقيت مجهول الهوية)؟

نعم:

لا:

أوافق أن يتم إقتباس كلماتي كما هي إذا تم إستعمال إسم مستعار للإشارة إليّ؟

نعم:

لا:

المشاركة الطوعية في الدراسة و الحق في الإنسحاب

مشاركتك في هذه الدراسة طوعية، و بالتالي، فمن حَقك أن تنسحب في أي وقت تريد، و بدون مسببات. و كنتيجة لذلك، سيتم إلغاء كل المعلومات الخاصة بك في الدراسة خلال أجل أقصاه 24 ساعة من تاريخ الإخطار. من أجل الإنسحاب من الدراسة عليك إخبار الباحث شخصياً و جها لوجه، أو عن طريق الهاتف، أو رسالة تليفونية، أو البريد الإلكتروني باللغة الإنجليزية أو العربية. بقرار إنسحابك من الدراسة. لكنه، إذا قام الباحث بإنهاء كتابة الدراسة و إرسال النسخة الأخيرة من الأطروحة إلى اللجنة العلمية لإجتياز الإمتحان الشفوي، و كلية التعليم العالي بجامعة مانيتوبا، فلن يكون بإمكانك أن تنسحب من الدراسة.

الأسئلة

لك كامل الحرية في طرح الأسئلة المتعلقة بمشاركتك في هذه الدراسة. إذا كان لديك أي أسئلة، أو مخاوف، أو إستفسارات خلال المقابلة، أو بعدها، فبإمكانك الإتصال بالباحث الرئيسي للدراسة على الرقم الهاتفي: أو البريد الإلكتروني: كما أنه بإمكانك الإتصال بالأستاذ المشرف على الدراسة، البروفسور شون بيرن على الرقم الهاتفي: أو البريد الإلكتروني:

إذا كان لديك أي أسئلة تتعلق بحقوقك كمشارك في هذه الدراسة الأكاديمية، فلا تتردد بالإتصال بالمجلس العلمي في جامعة مانيتوبا المسؤول عن قواعد و آداب البحث العلمي الرقم الهاتفي: (204) 474-7122 أو البريد الإلكتروني: humanethics@umanitoba.ca

التصريح بالموافقة

لقد قرأت هذا التصريح، و كانت لدي الفرصة لمناقشة هذه الدراسة مع الباحث الرئيسي للدراسة، نورالدين مغناوي. بحيث قام بالإجابة على كل أسئلتي باللغة الأي أفهمها. لقد تم شرح المخاطر و المنافع المرتقبة من مشاركتي في هذه الدراسة. أصرح أنه لم يتم الضغط علي أو إكراهي على المشاركة بشكل مباشر أو غير مباشر من قبل الباحث، أو أب مسؤول في العمل، أو أحد الأقارب، أو أي أحد أفراد المجتمع. أدرك أنه سيتم إعطائي نسخة من هذا التصريح بمجرد توقيع علي. و أدرك أن مشاركتي في هذه الدراسة طوعية، و أن من حقي الإنسحاب في أي وقت. و بناءً عليه، بكل حرية أوافق على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة الأكاديمية. أدرك أن المعلومات الخاصة بي المتعلقة بمشاركتي في هذه الدراسة ستبقى خصوصية و سرية، لكنني أدرك أن الخصوصية غير مضمونة بشكل كلي. أفض و أخول جامعة مانيتوبا و المجلس المختص بآداب و قواعد البحث العلمي بها بفحص و تدقيق و تفتيش كل البيانات المتعلقة بمشاركتي في هذه الدراسة من أجل ضمان جودة هذا البحث و إحترامه لقواعد البحث العلمي.

توحيي على هذا التصريح/الوثيقة لا يعني تنازلي عن حقوقي القانونية التي أتوفر عليها كمشارك في هذه الدراسة. من فضلك أجب على الأسئلة الواردة أدناه بإختيار الجواب نعم، أو لا:

هل توافق على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة عن طواعية؟

نعم:

لا:

هل توافق أن يتم تسجيل المقابلة بالمسجلة الصوتية؟

نعم:

لا:

هل توافق أن يتم ذكر إسمك عند نشر نتائج هذه الدراسة؟

نعم:

لا:

هل ترغب في التوصل بملخص حول نتائج الدراسة، و يتم إخبارك بالمنشورات الأكاديمية التي ستنبثق من هذه الدراسة:

نعم:

لا:

إذا كان جوابك نعم، من فضلك أكتب عنوان بريدك الإلكتروني.....

إسم المشترك:.....

توقيع المشترك:..... التاريخ.....

أنا الموقع أدناه، نورالدين مغناوي، أقر بالإلتزام بكل قواعد و أخلاقيات البحث العلمي المعمول بها في كندا الواردة في هذا الإقرار.

توقيع الباحث:..... التاريخ.....

Mental health resources in Victoria

4. Men's Trauma Centre

Counselling, education, and linkage to other agency services, for adult and late adolescent males and their partners, who are survivors of physical, emotional or sexual trauma.

There is a fee, but clients can apply for funding

#100-3060 Cedar Hill Road

Telephone: (250) 381-6367, (250) 381-0493 <http://www.menstrauma.com/>

5. Salvation Army – Counseling Services

Individual counseling, life skills training, support groups and practical guidance.

No cost

2695 Quadra Street. Telephone: 250-386-8521

6. Women's Sexual Assault Centre (VWSAC)

One-to-one, and groups for women dealing with current/past abuse

No cost.

#511-620 View Street, V8W 1J6 Telephone: (250) 383-3232, (250) 383-5545.

Fax: (250) 383-6112 <http://www.vwsac.com/>

Mental health resources in Nanaimo

4. Acute/Crisis Services

VI Crisis Line/Community Crisis Response Team
(24 hour service) Tel: 1-888-494-3888

5. Nanaimo Mental Health & Addiction Services

Access Services— Monday to Friday

203-2000 Island Highway North

Brooks Landing Mall Tel: 250-739-5710

Walk-In Counselling Clinic 10:00 am to 7:00 pm

No appointment necessary

6. Haven: A Society for Women and Children Community Service Building

2270 Labieux Road

24 Hour Crisis Line: 250-756-0616

Business Line: 250-756-2452

Appendix 6: Research Ethics Application

1. Summary of project:

Purpose:

This exploratory case study seeks to understand Syria's ethno-political conflict, and explore the possibilities of transforming it through peaceful processes from the perspective of ten members of the Syrian Diaspora in Nanaimo and Victoria, BC, particularly, those who fled Syria since 2011 onward. This study challenges the "top-down" liberal peacebuilding paradigm, and emphasizes the merits of "grassroots, bottom-up" emancipatory peacebuilding paradigm. Syria's violent civil war can be managed successfully by external guarantors and include a ceasefire, a peace agreement, elections monitoring, arms decommissioning, and security reform. However, these actions are less likely to secure a long-term sustainable peace, and establish the required socio-political structures in order to transform conflict/relationships and build a positive peace. The creation and implementation of a grassroots sustainable peace in societies emerging from war requires inclusive, organic, and holistic peacebuilding approaches. The primary goal of this study is to explore the possibility of transforming the ongoing ethno-political conflict in Syria based on the participants' visions and agency. It seeks to hear and deliver the voices, needs, and concerns of the Syrian Diaspora about the ongoing conflict in their homeland, and emphasize the importance of their role/agency in the peace process. Therefore, the study's main focus is on the future, rather than the past. Listening to participants with respect and appreciating their views will give them agency, empower them, and increase their self-esteem.

Methodology:

This qualitative study will utilize field notes, and semi-structured in-depth one-on-one individual interviews with 10 members of the Syrian Diaspora living in Victoria and Nanaimo, British Columbia. Semi-structured individual interviews provide participants with a secure and private setting to share their personal views freely about the research topic with the researcher, as opposed to group interviews. Also, it enables researchers to get rich responses through probing questions (DiCicco-Bloom, & Crabtree, 2006, p. 315). Using non-participant observation field notes in this study is essential to capture the participants' non-verbal expressions, such as facial expressions, hand gestures, and emotions, and write themes that emerge from the interviews.

Once I get the Research Ethics Board's approval, I will contact the management of local organizations (gatekeepers) that assist Syrian refugees such as the Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society, and the Islamic Center in Nanaimo, the Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria, and the Al-Iman Mosque in Victoria to request their permission to advertise my study in their organizations to recruit participants. Also, I will contact members of the Syrian Diaspora/refugees on an individual basis who attend activities at the Islamic Center of Nanaimo, and Al-Iman Mosque in Victoria to request their participation in a 90 minute audio-recorded interview and provide them with recruitment letter that explains the purpose of the research study, its goals, procedures, risks and benefits, and the researcher's ethics obligations (Appendix A). Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Therefore, prospective participants will be approached

on an individual basis with discreet. Hence, they would neither be pressured, nor inclined to accept my request. I am committed to respect the decision of individuals who choose not to participate in this study; thereby, I am committed to neither re-request their participation, nor disclose their identity. I would like to note as well that I am not in a position of power vis-à-vis prospective participants. I am a new resident in both communities; I recently moved with my wife to Victoria on April 18th 2017. However, I lived in Nanaimo in 2007-08, and it is the home of residence of my parents in-law. Therefore, using Victoria, and Nanaimo as research sites neither infers any particularity of both cities, nor reflects a particular quality of refugees who live there. Rather, it is convenient for me to conduct research there because they are both near my home of residence. Also, utilizing both cities will enhance the anonymity of the participants.

2. Research instruments:

This study will utilize one research instrument consisting of nine scripted open-ended interview questions, as well as non-scripted probing questions. I intend to use a conversational approach when conducting the interviews. Thus, I will not rigidly follow the numerical order of the questions. The interviews will be scheduled in advance in coordination with participants in the safest, and most convenient time and location for each interviewee. The scripted questions will include essential questions that address the main goals of the study. However, the unscripted questions or probing questions will emerge from the dialogue with interviewees. Interviewing is not a pragmatic methodology that seeks information from participants and treats them as a means to an end. In fact, it is a relationship that must be nurtured, and sustained with grace (Dexter, 1970, Hyman et al, 1954, Mishler, 1986 as cited in Seidman, 2006, p. 95). Thus, from a moral standpoint, researchers must not treat participants merely as a means, but as subjects and agents of their own destiny (Kant, 2002, p. 229 as cited in Seidman, 2013, p. 141). The essential questions that serve the research goals are as follows:

2. I would be interested to know about your coming to Canada, can you tell me when did you leave Syria, and come to Canada?
 - PROBE: Interesting, can you tell me more about that?
 - PROBE: Can you describe Syria before the protests, and the armed struggle against Assad's regime, and now?
 - PROBE: Can you provide me with an example of that?

2. How do you feel about what's happening in Syria now?
 - PROBE: Interesting, can you tell me more about that?
 - PROBE: What do you think should be done to resolve the conflict in Syria, and reconstruct peace?
 - PROBE: Can you provide me with an example of that?

3. What do you understand by (1) peacebuilding, and (2) reconciliation?
 - PROBE: Interesting, can you provide me with an example for that?

4. Do you feel Syria will ever be at "peace"? Why, or why not?
 - PROBE: What should be done to restore peace in Syria?

PROBE: Interesting, can you provide me with an example of that?

5. What would peaceful Syria look-like and mean to you?

PROBE: Can you provide me with an example of that?

PROBE: What is needed to get there? What constitutes a successful peace resolution?

PROBE: Can you provide me with an example of that?

10. What role did you play, or intend to play to reconstruct peace in Syria, and sustain mutual existence, and mutual respect in your community in Syria?

PROBE: Can you provide me with an example of that?

PROBE: Would you return to your community in Syria? If yes, what are your plans?

PROBE: How would you contribute to peacebuilding in your community in Syria? Do have a plan/ideas to transform relationship and sustain peace in your community?

PROBE: Can you provide me with an example of that?

11. What role do you think external regional and international powers need to play in Syria to transform the conflict and reconstruct sustainable peace?

PROBE: Interesting, can you tell me more about that?

PROBE: Can you provide me with an example of that?

PROBE: What role do you want Canada to play now in the peace talks, and the peacebuilding process in a post peace accord?

12. What are your hopes, and dreams for your future and for Syria's future?

PROBE: Interesting, can you tell me more about that?

PROBE: Can you provide me with an example of that?

13. What are your worst fears, and worries for your future and for Syria's?

PROBE: Interesting, can you tell me more about that?

PROBE: Can you provide me with an example of that?

3. Study Participants:

The primary researcher will request the participation of 10 members of the Syrian Diaspora who reside in Nanaimo and Victoria, BC, in a 90 minute audio-recorded one-on-one interview. The study's participants will be recruited through the use of convenience, purposive and snowball-sampling methods in order to have a diverse sample that represents a subset of the Syrian Diaspora population living in both communities. Prospective participants will reflect diversity in terms of age, gender, socioeconomic status, level of education, and region of residence in Syria. Each participant will be provided with a copy of the recruitment letter (Appendix A), and the informed consent form (Appendix B, and C). The principal researcher will provide prospective participants with the informed consent form in Arabic and English, ask them to read it carefully, and urge them to ask any clarification questions. The recruitment letter and informed consent form contain all contact information of the primary

researcher, Nour-Eddine Maghnaoui, research advisor, Dr. Sean Byrne, and Research Ethics Board. Thus, participants will be asked explicitly to ask questions, and express their concerns either face-to-face with the primary researcher, or via email, and phone with whom they may consider needed.

4. Informed Consent:

Participation in this study will be completely voluntary, based on the participants' free will, and full awareness of the research project, its purpose, procedure, risks and potential benefits, their rights, and the researcher's ethics obligations and responsibilities. The written consent is only part of the informed consent process. Thus, at all stages of this study, I will review and explain to participants the goal of the study, their rights, and the researcher's obligations and responsibilities. Also, I will repeatedly and explicitly encourage participants to ask questions, and voice their concerns that relate to the research and their involvement in the project as a whole. A copy of the informed consent form will be provided to participants in English (Appendix B), and in Arabic (Appendix C). The participants' initial acceptance to participate in this study, and signature on the informed consent form does not seize their right to withdraw from the study at anytime. The research participants retain the full right to withdraw from this study at anytime, for any reason, and without explanation. If a participant chooses to withdraw from this study, all information s/he provided during the interview would be withdrawn from the study and destroyed.

5. Deception:

This study will not employ deception through the withholding or misrepresentation of information, or in any other manner.

6. Feedback/Debriefing

At the end of the interview, the principal researcher will thank interviewees for their time and participation in the study, and most importantly, for their valuable insights/responses on the interview questions. In addition, the principal researcher will provide interviewees with a comprehensive summary of the upcoming steps of the research process till the writing of the final draft of the thesis and successfully defending it in an oral examination at the University of Manitoba before the Thesis Advisory Committee members, Dr. Sean Byrne (committee Chair), and Advisory Committee Members: Dr. Dean Peachey and Dr. Michelle Gallant, approximately by May 2018.

Within maximum of four weeks of the interview, I will provide each interviewee with a copy of the interview transcripts in person. The purpose of providing participants with a copy of their interview transcripts is to give them agency in the research by enabling them to make changes for any reason they want in the data content, and construct a version of the interview that they feel satisfied and safe with making public. Therefore, participants can ask for changes in the interview transcripts either by adding new content, or correcting something incorrect in the transcript, or deleting something they wish that they had not said, or removing/changing information that they think could reveal their identity.

The study participants will be encouraged to use the contact information enlisted in the recruitment letter (Appendix A, & D), and the informed consent form (Appendix

B, & C) to contact the principal researcher, Nour-Eddine Maghnaoui, research advisor, Dr. Sean Byrne, and Research Ethics Board in order to ask further questions, and/or voice their concerns and complaints.

7. Risks and Benefits:

Potential Risks: There is a minimal potential risk that the identity of participants could be identified. To remedy that risk, participants who choose to participate anonymously in this study will have the right to use pseudonyms when they sign the written informed consent form. Moreover, each interviewee will receive a copy of the interview transcription to check if it has any detail that could reveal his/her identity, and ask for changing/removing any information that could compromise their privacy and safety. I chose to conduct my research in two communities, Nanaimo and Victoria, BC, in order to enhance the anonymity of participants through diversion. The final draft of the thesis, and academic articles and presentations that will stem from the research data will contain the participants' quotes that reflect their visions and plans of reconstructing peace in Syria. Furthermore, I will not specify in which city participants reside. All records of participants' data will remain confidential. Only my research supervisor, Dr. Sean Byrne and I will have access to the information in which they are identified. Also, the University of Manitoba reserves its right to look at my research records to ensure that it is done accordingly to the academic and research ethics standards. All data that relate to this study; particularly, the participants' information will be deleted and shredded at the end of the project, by December 30, 2018. In case of electronic transmission of data records whether to Dr. Byrne, or Research Ethics Board names, addresses, and telephone numbers of the participants will be removed.

In addition, using the snowball sampling might pose minimal risks to the confidentiality, anonymity of both the recommender, and recommended participant, and the freedom of the recommendee to accept or decline to participate in the study. To remedy that risk I will include in the recruitment letter the following clause, "if you receive this letter from a third party other than the primary researcher, such as a Syrian friend, or a relative, or a member of the community, or an employee/volunteer in a local non-profit organization, please do not disclose your decision about accepting, or declining the invitation. Please contact the principal researcher to express your decision, ask questions, and express concerns. Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. Therefore, feel free to decline to participate. However, if you experienced coercion from a third party to participate in the study, do not hesitate to report it to the principal researcher, or the Human Ethics Coordinator via phone, or email" (page, 8). Moreover, if a recommendee contacts me to express his/her initial decision to participate in the study, I will not ask him/her to reveal the name of the recommender. I will meet each participant, either the recommender, or recommendee on an individual basis in the place and time most convenient and safe for them to further explain the goal of the study, participants rights, my ethical and research obligations, provide them with a copy of the informed consent form, and respond to their questions and concerns that relate to their participation in the study.

In addition, the research questions in this study might pose minimal risks to the participants who incurred traumatic experiences throughout their displacement journey within Syria, and outside of Syria. To remedy that risk, the informed consent form

(Appendix B and C) gives interviewees the right to avoid answering questions that emotional and might revive unpleasant memories. Before each interview, I will remind the interviewee about his/her right to skip questions that s/he might find upsetting, and/or request to stop the interview, or withdraw from the study. Also, the consent form contains the location and phone numbers of multiple counseling clinics and resources based in Nanaimo, and Victoria, BC that can assist individuals who are experiencing trauma. Thus, if a participant experiences an emotional breakdown during the interview, I am committed to stop the interview immediately and drive him/her to a health clinic to seek assistance if needed/requested. All information they provided during the interview would be withdrawn from the study and destroyed. To remedy the risk of re-traumatization of participants, at the questions design stage, I am committed to design questions that are free from my own biases and pre-assumptions, but indicate respect and appreciation. Consequently, the scripted and unscripted questions will not incur a judgmental tone of “why” questions; in fact, they will be open-ended questions, “how questions” (Van den Hoonard, 2015, p. 58; Bogdan, and Biklen, 2007, p. 48-52). At the interview stage, I intend to utilize a friendly conversational approach that enables the research participants to talk freely, and give them a sense that they are valued partners in the research process, not subjects under investigation (Van den Hoonard, 2015, p. 59).

Potential benefits: This study gives particular emphasis to the transformation of the ongoing ethno-political conflict in Syria through peaceful processes. Therefore, it focuses primarily on the future, rather than the past and the ongoing war atrocities. Listening to participants with respect and appreciating their views might be therapeutic, empowering, provide them space for reflection and closure, and give them hope and agency to proactively engage in the peacebuilding processes in the post-conflict phase (Elmir, et. al., 2011, p. 13).

8. Anonymity or Confidentiality:

As indicated above, the research participants will participate in one session audio-recorded individual interview for 90 minutes. Participants who choose to participate anonymously in this study will have the right to use pseudonyms when they sign the written informed consent form. The names of participants will not be used in any documentation or publication without explicit written consent from the participants. Before beginning the study. All of the participants will be asked to sign a consent form (Appendix B and C). The audio-tapes will be transcribed into text by the principal researcher. Each interviewee will receive a copy of the transcription to identify any detail that may identify him/her, and ask for changes in data content that s/he feels comfortable to make public. All information will be kept strictly confidential; the signed consent forms, audio-tapes, and interview observational notes will be kept in a locked cabinet owned by the researcher, and all electronic information will be stored on a password-encrypted computer.

During the discussion, dissemination, and publication of the study results, the participants’ names will not be disclosed; only pseudonyms and non-identifiable information will be used to highlight specific points. Only my research advisor, Dr. Sean Byrne and I will have access to the information in which they are identified. Also, the University of Manitoba reserves its right to look at my research records at anytime to

ensure that it is done accordingly to the academic and research ethics standards. All data that relate to this study; particularly, the participants' information will be deleted and shredded at the end of the project by December 30, 2018.

Participants who accept to participate in the study preserve their right to withdraw at anytime from the study without explanation. If a participant chooses to withdraw either before the interview, during the interview, or after the interview, s/he will be guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. All data that relates to the individual will be destroyed within 24 hours of reporting his/her decision to the principal researcher either in person, by phone, or email in English or Arabic. To withdraw from the study, participants must explicitly inform the primary researcher about their decision using the contact information listed in the recruitment letter and informed consent form. Nonetheless, once the final draft of the thesis is submitted to the Thesis Advisory Committee for the oral exam, and the Faculty of Graduate Studies at the University of Manitoba, participants will not be able to request to withdraw from the study. This clause will be emphasized explicitly in the consent form and verbally stated to each participant during the informational session and prior to the interview.

9. Compensation:

The study participants will not be compensated monetarily for their participation in my study. However, depending on the time of the interview (e.g. lunch) some snacks and beverage may be provided by the researcher.

14. Dissemination

The results of this study will be presented in my Master's thesis for partial completion of my Joint Master's Program in Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Manitoba. Upon the successful defense of my thesis, during an oral examination at the University of Manitoba, before the Thesis Advisory Committee members, Dr. Sean Byrne (committee Chair), and Advisory Committee Members: Dr. Dean Peachy and Dr. Michelle Gallant, a copy of my thesis will be publically available on the University of Manitoba's webpage (approximately September 30, 2018) at: https://mspace.lib.umanitoba.ca/discover?scope=%2F&query=PEACE+AND+CONFLICT+&submit=Go&filtertype_0=dateIssued&filter_0=%5B2000+TO+2017%5D&filter_relational_operator_0=equals

The study findings may also be presented in conferences' presentations, and published in scholarly journals. At the participants' request, they could also be notified about future publications that arise from this research either by email or mail. The dissemination of the study findings will preserve the utmost anonymity and confidentiality of participants. The published results that stem from the research data will not include any sort of indicators that may identify the participants. In addition, I am committed to maintain the privacy of the participants. Therefore, once the study is disseminated, I will neither contact the participants to re-discuss the content of their responses during the interviews, nor share their information with third parties.

The following appendices are attached: (these appendices are listed above as appendix 1, 2, 3, 4)

- A- Recruitment letter of participation.**
- B- Informed consent form (English version).**
- C- Informed consent form (Arabic version).**
- D- Recruitment letter (Arabic version).**

Appendix 7: Research Ethics Protocol Approval

Research Ethics and Compliance is a part of the Office of the Vice-President (Research and International) umanitoba.ca/research

PROTOCOL APPROVAL

TO: Nour-Eddine Maghnaoui (Advisor: Sean Byrne)

Principal Investigator

FROM: Kevin Russell, Chair

Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board (JFREB)

Re: Protocol J2017:065 (HS20975)

“Syrian Diaspora’s Perception and Agency in Peacebuilding and Reconciliation in Syria”

Effective: August 31, 2017 **Expiry:** August 31, 2018

Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board (JFREB) has reviewed and approved the above research. JFREB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*.

This approval is subject to the following conditions:

1. Approval is granted only for the research and purposes described in the application.
2. Any modification to the research must be submitted to JFREB for approval before implementation.
3. Any deviations to the research or adverse events must be submitted to JFREB as soon as possible.
4. This approval is valid for one year only and a Renewal Request must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date.
5. A Study Closure form must be submitted to JFREB when the research is complete or terminated.
6. The University of Manitoba may request to review research documentation from this project to demonstrate compliance with this approved protocol and the University of Manitoba *Ethics of Research Involving Humans*.

Funded Protocols:

- **Please mail/e-mail a copy of this Approval, identifying the related UM Project Number, to the Research Grants Officer in ORS.**

Appendix 8: Research Ethics Renewal Approval

Research Ethics and Compliance is a part of the Office of the Vice-President (Research and International) umanitoba.ca/research

RENEWAL APPROVAL

Date: August 8, 2018

New Expiry: August 31, 2019

TO: Nour-Eddine Maghnaoui (Advisor Sean Byrne) Principal Investigator

FROM: Julia Witt, Chair

Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board (JFREB)

Re: Protocol #J2017:065 (HS20975)

**“Syrian Diaspora’s Perception and Agenda in Peacebuilding
And Reconciliation in Syria”**

Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board (JFREB) has reviewed and renewed the above research. JFREB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*.

This approval is subject to the following conditions:

1. Any modification to the research must be submitted to JFREB for approval before implementation.
2. Any deviations to the research or adverse events must be submitted to JFREB as soon as possible.
3. This renewal is valid for one year only and a Renewal Request must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date.
4. A Study Closure form must be submitted to JFREB when the research is complete or terminated.

Funded Protocols:

- Please mail/e-mail a copy of this Renewal Approval, identifying the related UM Project Number, to the Research Grants Officer in ORS.